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"HOW TO SUPERVISE PEOPLE"

"EMPLOYEE TRAINING"

"SUPERVISION OF GOVERNMENTAL EMPLOYEES"

ALFRED M. COOPER

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# HOW TO CONDUCT CONFERENCES

*Second Edition*

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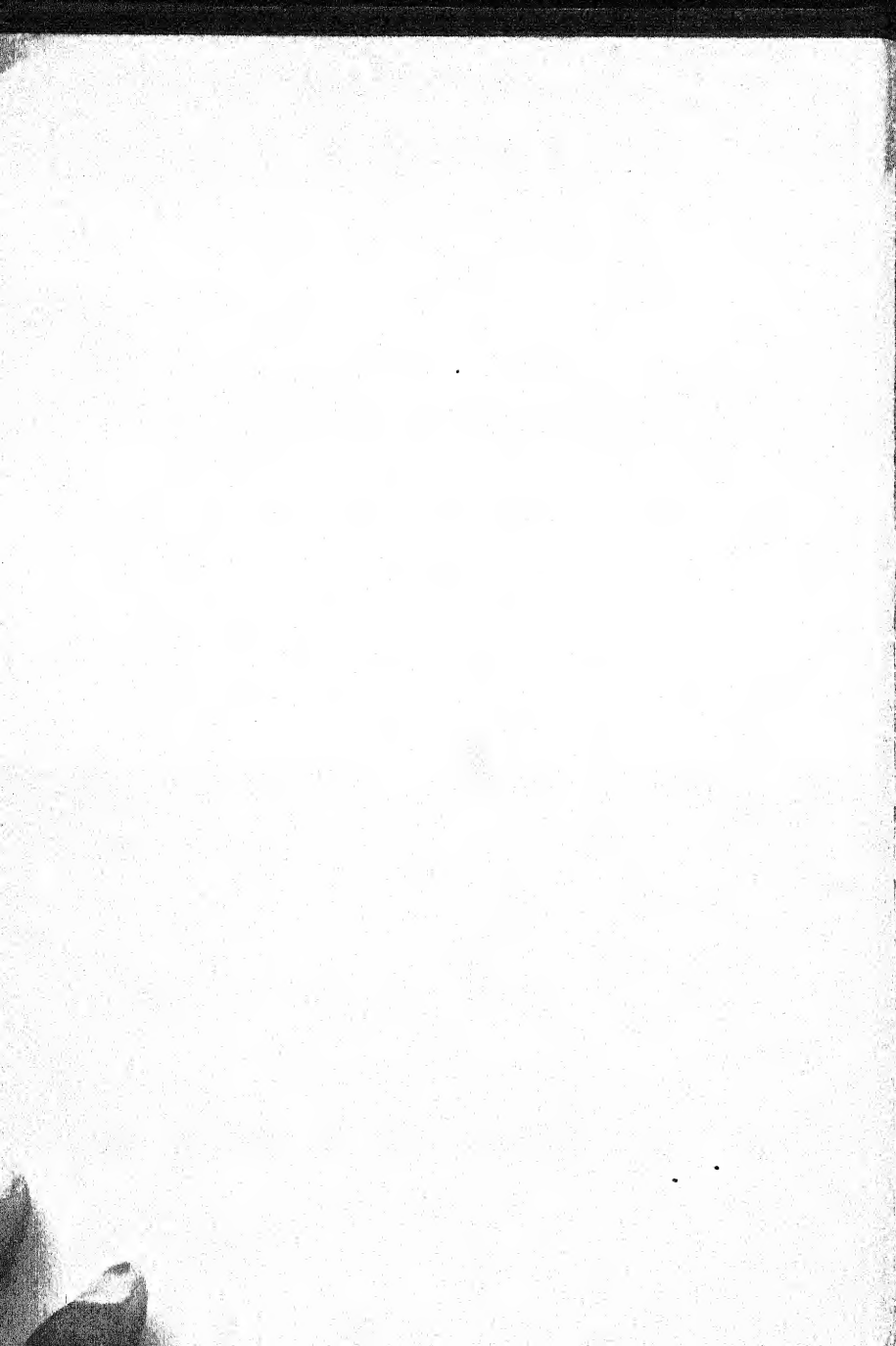
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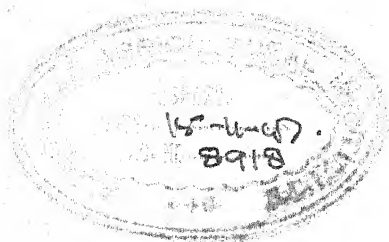
## HOW TO CONDUCT CONFERENCES

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HOW TO CONDUCT CONFERENCES

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The original edition of this book appeared just as we were entering the Second World War. During the war years the methods of conference leadership outlined in that edition found wide application in discussion meetings of every type. Certainly there has never been greater use made of the conference as an instrument for getting things done than in our wartime industries.

Now the war is over, America needs this pooling of brain power that comes from conference discussion more than ever. If we are to overcome the obstacles that confront us, there must be conferences convened to determine our policy in international affairs, and conferences to determine courses of action to be taken in religious, civic, and social activities.

As with any comparatively new development, it has taken time for the average leader of business conferences to put into practice the methods of directing discussion that are outlined in these pages. Now, however, it is believed that the average business and training conference is conducted much more efficiently than was the case but a few years ago.

In this revised edition of "How to Conduct Conferences," certain changes have been made in the text in order to bring the material up to date. As one instance of this, a new chapter has been added

in which detailed consideration is given to methods of conducting the labor relations conference, an application of conference procedure that has recently become of vital importance to the welfare of the nation.

It is believed that this text will continue to be helpful to all those who are called upon to conduct conferences of any type and for any purpose.

ALFRED M. COOPER.

FORT MYERS, FLA.,

*June, 1946.*

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The conference has become so much a part of the American way of life that we have come to take it for granted. We expect all vital decisions affecting our welfare to be made in conference. We are governed by conference. We do business through conferences. We decide important issues in our civic and community affairs in conference. We discuss in conference all matters pertaining to the administration of our club and social activities. As an instrument of accomplishment, the conference now far outweighs oratory.

No conference can be successful unless it is properly conducted. The leader at the head of the table must know how to direct discussion in such a manner as to get results. In most of today's conferences, parliamentary procedure is out. Discussion is informal, uncircumscribed by set rules of participation. The new conference is truly streamlined.

To the extent that the modern conference departs from cumbersome parliamentary formality, the leader of such a meeting must learn how to control the conference situation without recourse to cut-and-dried rules of order. It has long been recognized that training in public speaking is an important asset to any man or woman engaged in business or professional pursuits, or in club or governmental activities. Now that the conference has so

generally superseded oratory as a device for getting things done, it is time these same men and women were being trained also in the technique of conference leadership. So far there has been afforded little opportunity for anyone to master this subject through formal instruction. It is for this reason that so many conferences today are poorly conducted and therefore but partially effective in obtaining results.

The free, open, and informal discussion meeting, conducted along nonparliamentary lines, is a development of the twentieth century. It had its origin in American industry, where the need for a pooling of brain power created today's business conference. In industry, also, the conference had its first extensive application as a device for teaching.

Thus, through trial and error, a considerable body of empirical knowledge on the subject of conference leadership has developed. In preparing the material for this book, it has been the intention to analyze this information, classify it, and make it available to the reader in the form best calculated to help him in mastering the rather new art of directing group discussion to a useful conclusion.

This book should be of assistance to any man or woman who is called upon to conduct conferences of any type, for whatever purpose. It may also be used as a text in conference leadership classes or as a reference book by those interested in the subject of conducting resultful conferences.

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.,  
May, 1942.

ALFRED M. COOPER.

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# HOW TO CONDUCT CONFERENCES

## CHAPTER I

### THE CONFERENCE LEADER

Whenever two or more people sit down to discuss a question in the solution of which they have a common interest, a conference ensues. If the discussion is carried on intelligently, this meeting of minds eventually will result in a reasonable and amicable agreement on the fundamental issues involved in that question. This is so whether the conference has been called to decide a minor question, of importance only to the group discussing it, or a grave problem, on the solution of which the fate of nations may depend.

When two or more people engage in a discussion, one or more of the group will inevitably attempt to lead that conference. This is true even in the so-called "round-table" discussions, for which no official leader has been appointed. Because of this it is better to select a leader before a meeting convenes and empower this individual to conduct the meeting, than it is to engage in a leaderless, and therefore, perhaps, a pointless discussion.

When all conferences were conducted by parliamentary procedure, in which it was necessary for anyone who wished to speak to say "Mr. Chairman" and be acknowledged before he was allowed to have his say, the leader needed only to memorize a set of "rules of order"; then he was at once as well qualified as a person could be to lead a meeting. Now that the conference has become a standard business device, however, there is less and less emphasis on formality and parliamentary procedure. In the same degree as parliamentary usage is discarded, the conference becomes more effective, and the job of the conference leader becomes more difficult.

The conference as a device for getting things done is as modern as the year we live in. The dogmatic dissertation in Socratic dialogue, perhaps the earliest manifestation of conference technique, bears but the faintest resemblance to the streamlined, resultful discussion meeting of today.

The modern conference originated as a business method of accomplishing something by pooling the ideas of a number of persons, all of whom were interested in solving a common problem. Despite the fact that the business conference has been traditionally mismanaged, and an enormous amount of time wasted in discussions that wandered all over creation, nevertheless this method of developing ideas in groups has been so successful that its forerunner in this field—oratory—has by contrast gone into a sharp decline.

Because the technique of conference leadership

has been developed empirically, as a practical business device rather than as an application of theoretical procedure, many, many errors have been made. Even now it is not uncommon to see the head of an organization seated majestically at a conference table about which are gathered his palpitating lieutenants. Each man present hangs on every momentous utterance of the great man. In such a "conference" the boss talks and the subordinates listen. The ultimate in participation on the part of any group member is "Yes, Mr. —!"

It is, of course, farcical to dub a meeting of this sort a conference. Except for the position of the audience there is no distinction between this session and any other lecture. Much more goes into the making of a conference than a beautiful table, a dozen or so chairs, and a group of men or women seated about the board. But while much fun has been poked at these pseudo conferences—and rightfully—the *real* conferences have been quietly going on, in business, in government, in our social, school, and domestic lives, without fuss or oratory; and generally they have been accomplishing what they were designed to accomplish.

It must be understood that there is a time and a place for the lecture, and a time and a place for the conference. Rarely will the two serve interchangeably to obtain the same excellent results. When a lecture or a speech is indicated, much time and trouble will be saved by scheduling an address instead of a conference. Likewise, when choice must be made between a poor conference and almost any

kind of talk, the lecture is the thing. An improperly planned and poorly conducted discussion meeting may well be a distressing waste of time for everyone concerned.

On the other hand, a good conference, held under proper conditions, will obtain results impossible for a lecturer to secure, no matter how fine an orator the speaker may be. Perhaps the best proof of this fact lies in the lapse of oratory in such parliamentary groups as our Congress. Increasingly in lawmaking bodies, dependence for the real work of developing effective legislation is placed on the committee. Where, not so very long ago, laws of the most far-reaching social significance were enacted solely by virtue of some solon's gift of persuasive forensics, now a bill must be threshed out in conference before it appears before the House or the Senate.. It is particularly significant that the findings and recommendations of committees carry more weight in the final passage or defeat of a measure than does all the impassioned speechmaking which may follow its submittal to the lawmaking body for approval or rejection. Even the professional orator places more confidence in the sober, reasoned conclusions of a conference group than in what may be the emotional and unreasonable plea of an extremely biased individual who, however clever and gifted he may be, nevertheless expresses the opinion of but one man.

If there is a time and a place for public speaking and a time and a place for conferences, and you are equally qualified to conduct either type of meeting, the question at once arises: When shall you lecture

to any group and when shall you lead a discussion with that group? The answer to this question is simple and obvious, but it is not so well-known as it should be to many who are responsible for decisions in matters such as these.

You should lecture to a group only when the subject to be considered is beyond the experience and knowledge of that group. You should conduct a conference whenever the group members have experience in and knowledge of the subject under discussion.

Inherent in the lecture is the assumption of superior knowledge on the part of the speaker. It is for this reason that we so frequently find in teachers a natural predisposition toward *telling* their students the things they should know. Likewise, the politician and certain types of salesmen and executives frequently prefer to display their superior knowledge of affairs, of wares, of processes and techniques, by indulging in speechmaking.

On the other hand, there is inherent in the conference the assumption that not merely the leader, but every member of the discussion group has something valuable to contribute to the occasion. So true has this been found to be that it has become axiomatic in training conference leaders that no man or woman can become a good discussion leader who is not completely convinced that his group, as a whole, *knows more about the subject under discussion than he does*. It is the inability to make such a confession, even tacitly, that often makes impos-

sible the conversion of the professional orator into a good conference leader.

In considering the above rule for deciding when to hold a conference, it might at first appear that the conference could never be used as a teaching device; that all instruction must be given by lecture method. Actually, this is far from being true, as has been repeatedly proved in schools, in colleges, and in training employees in industrial and commercial organizations. Particularly where the students are adults, and the instruction deals with the work in which they are engaged, it has been demonstrated again and again that, in results attained, the conference method of teaching is superior to the lecture method.

But it is in other activities, closer to our business, professional, and social lives, that the conference has demonstrated its greatest value. When the corporation department head, or the chairman of any committee, sits down at the conference table with subordinates or committee members, difficult problems are solved in the American way—by an attack on these problems participated in equally by everyone present. This is where the lecture falls down, even when it is followed by a question-and-answer period, since here the attack on the problem continues to remain that of one mind only.

This, also, is the reason why the business conference, poorly conducted as too often it has been, has continued in effect year after year. There is something so essentially right and democratic about the

conference idea that even in its worst manifestations it has proved its worth in business.

It would be surprising if, after millions of such conferences had been held, there did not develop some standards of good and bad conference leadership technique. By trial and error, and without benefit of any existing body of knowledge on the subject, these business executives and committee chairmen individually worked out methods of getting results in conferences. Some of these methods were applicable under any and all conditions; others applied only under specific circumstances.

Previous to the development of the business type of conference in the past 30 years or so, there had been but two known methods of conducting any meeting. Either someone addressed the meeting, or it was conducted according to "parliamentary procedure," a dignified but old-fashioned, cumbersome, and unwieldy method of attempting to give everyone present at the meeting an opportunity to have his say. Actually, as we shall see, accepted parliamentary procedure is frequently the antithesis of good conference procedure, and employment of it often operates to kill the vital spark of spontaneity that makes the true conference so resultful. This formal procedure, then, should never be employed except when the meetings to be conducted are made up of very large assemblages or when they involve governmental bodies where its use is mandatory.

Parliamentary procedure, as compared with the streamlined conference, is awkward and slow; it inhibits rather than stimulates thought. Its one ad-



vantage, from the leader's standpoint, is that control of the situation is easier than in the conference. However, a discussion leader who has learned to control any conference situation without the necessity of "recognizing" the group member who wishes to speak, or without having to tell someone he is "out of order," will gladly dispense with the clumsy technicalities of formal debate.

The true conference, whether it is used in business or in committee work or in educational activity, is a timesaver. It has no lost motion. Within a minute or so after the meeting opens, the group has before it an important problem, the solution of which will require the best combined efforts of all brains present.

From that point until the problem is solved the meeting belongs to the group. The leader has a lot to do with the solution of the problem (indeed, he may even determine what solution the group eventually will arrive at), but his participation in the discussion is indirect and adroit rather than vociferous and forceful.

Like the lecture, but unlike the parliamentary meeting, the conference can be carefully planned in advance. Indeed, the wise conference leader invariably prepares some sort of written plan for each conference he conducts. By so doing he is prepared for any situation that will arise during a meeting and knows beforehand exactly how he will handle it. Also, the leader may wish to determine the direction a particular discussion will take, and this can be done only when some previous thought has been

given to the subject matter for the conference and to the group that is to discuss it.

Careful personal preparation for a conference by the one who is to lead it, along the lines suggested in the pages to follow, has the important effect of removing all fear from the leader's mind. Especially is this true as regards that fear which is responsible for most of the poor conference leadership we see exhibited—the fear of loss of control of the situation. When you can open a discussion meeting knowing where you want to go, and in the full knowledge of how to get there, you are at ease and in complete command of the conference situation. The unprepared leader never quite attains this feeling of confidence.

In conducting a real conference the leader must avoid from the outset those actions that bespeak the orator, on the one hand, and the parliamentary chairman, on the other. The leader must refrain from lecturing his group and limit his own participation in the meeting to a few introductory remarks, followed by those keen, thought-provoking questions that stimulate discussion; questions—not statements of opinion.

The leader can eliminate parliamentary procedure and thereby speed up his conference by putting into effect the following unparliamentary practices: (1) No one in the group need seek recognition from the chair before speaking. Thus, group members speak directly to one another, without the formality of first going through an intermediary. This speeds up discussion immensely. (2) The leader partici-

pates at will during the discussion, reserving the right to interrupt any speaker without recourse to rules of order. (3) With the exception of the five conference rules of order later referred to (Chap. XII), the leader makes his own rulings in any situation that may arise, regardless of parliamentary procedure or precedent.

It should at once be obvious that the success of any true conference is more dependent on the leader than is the case when the meeting is conducted by a chairman under parliamentary rules of order. Having more leeway, the conference leader can either make a meeting successful or ruin it, depending only on what he does or fails to do. Therefore, it requires more study and practice to become a good conference leader than it does to become a good parliamentary chairman.

Good conference leadership calls for the possession of certain positive characteristics on the part of the leader. If he does not have these and cannot develop them, he will never make a very good leader of discussion groups. On the other hand, they are not unusual characteristics, and are commonly possessed by most people who have occasion to lead conferences.

To begin with, a conference leader must have the ability to restrain his own desire for self-expression. He must learn to keep quiet himself, at the same time encouraging others to talk. Obviously, then, he must, besides, be an extremely good listener. It is in these two paramount qualifications that the trained public speaker may be weakest.

The conference leader must have the ability to inspire confidence in others. He must have a feeling of genuine fellowship with the members of his conference group. He must be fair-minded and open-minded, and prove this repeatedly in each conference he conducts. He must have self-confidence, and at times must even display real courage. He must have a kindly sense of humor. He must have vitality. He must be resourceful. He must possess tact.

Anyone who has ever led a series of conferences will agree that the above-named characteristics are essential in a good conference leader. If he cannot repress his desire to talk he will talk too much, and there is no better way to wreck any conference than for the leader to participate too frequently or for too long a period at a time.

If the leader cannot inspire confidence he will not be capable of retaining control of the conference situation in a meeting conducted without benefit of parliamentary rules of order. The group must feel that its leader knows what he is about, even though the members do not understand why he does certain things. Such blind adherence calls for confidence. This confidence is based on the group's contact, in and out of conference, with the conference leader.

Many discussion leaders fail because they lack a feeling of fellowship with their group members. This failing shows up most frequently in young leaders, and particularly in young men who are called upon to lead meetings with those of lesser rank in an organization, or with those of less scho-

lastic attainment. When this feeling of fellowship is absent the group is quick to sense the lack and to display a natural resentment in consequence. If a discussion leader discovers within himself any trace of a feeling of superiority toward his group, either he should eradicate it or he should stick to public speaking, where such an attitude is less likely to cause him trouble.

Fair-mindedness and open-mindedness may not be the characteristics that are most commonly met with among men and women in general. Yet the conference leader who has, on repeated occasions, been convicted by his group of partiality and close-mindedness will never get results while leading conferences with that group. In conference, partiality most often takes the form of indicating preference for individuals or ideas, as opposed to other individuals or their expressed ideas. This practice, persisted in, even unconsciously, will cause trouble for the leader and eventually make it impossible for him to get results with that group. Close-mindedness is most often manifested when a situation develops in which the leader, perhaps through a display of prejudice, has been guilty of taking sides in a controversy. Then he has a choice of admitting bias and apologizing to the injured group members, or stubbornly attempting to continue without admitting unfair leadership tactics. When a leader asks his group to be open-minded in discussing a question, then himself fails to exhibit the same quality, he will, of course, lose the respect of that group.

The conference leader has most need of self-con-

fidence when he is asked to lead discussion in a group the members of which are strangers to him. Particularly if this be a training conference, in which attendance is compulsory, it is not uncommon to encounter antagonism in such a group. Here the leader's self-confidence is based on his knowledge of previous successful meetings that he has conducted with groups in which there were similar unfriendly elements. Confidence in the efficacy of such devices of successful leadership as are outlined in other chapters of this book will go far toward alleviating any fear the leader may feel at the opening of such a conference.

The possession of a sense of humor is not so common as many of us would like to believe. Too many public speakers (and conference leaders, too) believe that the ability to tell a funny story well is evidence that the narrator possesses a sense of humor. The real test, of course, is whether or not we can see a joke when it is on ourselves. Telling funny stories may have a place in public speaking, but in conference leading this practice should be omitted.

Humor is a vitally important factor in the make-up of any good conference, but it should never originate with the leader. It must develop from the discussion itself, and at most the leader may only point it up. The leader's sense of humor will be best displayed on those occasions when by some chance turn in the talk he is placed in the position of being laughed at by the group. If he can join in this laughter wholeheartedly, everything will be

well. If he can see nothing funny about his own loss of dignity in such a situation, and shows resentment at the group's laughter, he has, in the members' estimation, displayed a definite lack of sense of humor. If this happens often the group loses much of its feeling of friendliness for the leader.

It is difficult to appreciate the importance of vitality as an element of good conference leadership until you attempt to lead a difficult meeting at a time when you lack abundance of vital force. Perhaps the best way to emphasize the necessity for having plenty of reserve energy is to state that the proper conduct of a red-hot conference takes more out of the leader than does the delivery of a speech extending over a comparable length of time. This is true because the effort required for controlling a score of excited participants is considerably greater than that needed to address, however vehemently, a quiescent audience.

Resourcefulness, as a quality of conference leadership, is called into play many times in any conference. Usually the occasion is the occurrence of something entirely unexpected in the meeting, something that the leader has been unable to foresee in planning the conference. If he is not to give the impression of having been caught unprepared, he will do some quick thinking and come up with the right answer before the group senses his discomfiture.

Although it is named last among our qualifications for conference leadership, tact is a more important factor than its position here would indicate. It is

the oil that makes the conference function smoothly. The leader who possesses it will never unwittingly offend a group member by any wounding remark, however unintentional, dropped carelessly in the heat of the discussion. If the leader senses an inexplicable antagonism on the part of one or more group members, it would be well for him to check himself for avoidance of future exhibitions of tactlessness.

The qualifications here outlined as those of a good conference leader may appear somewhat appalling, and anyone who possessed them all might appear to be somewhat of a superman. It may simplify matters, therefore, if we state that a good conference leader must have the same qualifications as a good supervisor or executive, no more and no less. If you will check the characteristics listed you will see that this is true. Good supervisors are not rare; therefore, the possessor of these qualities is not necessarily an unusual person. Incidentally, I have found that good supervisors almost invariably make good conference leaders.

There is one additional characteristic of the efficient discussion leader that is not included in the foregoing outline. To give a name to this qualification is rather difficult, but that the conference leader should possess it is extremely important. Briefly, it is this: The leader must have the ability to *see the obvious*.

Curious as it may seem, many intelligent men and women cannot see the obvious. In leading a conference, such a person may overlook the simple,



logical, and perfectly natural follow-up question, and insert into the discussion a clumsy, ill-timed, and ill-chosen question, which functions only to slow up discussion and confuse the group. In the same way, people who have this handicap may, when leading conferences, fail to point up perfectly obvious conclusions in their summations, simply because these facts have entirely escaped their notice. It is this same type of earnest but circuitous-minded conference leader who, when preparing for a conference that calls for a blackboard development, always procures the portable blackboard, but seldom thinks to provide crayon and eraser.

It is a question whether this ability to see the obvious can be taught or developed any more than can that desirable quality we call "gumption." If, when leading a conference, the leader discovers that his participation seems to confuse the group rather than to clarify the discussion, I would suggest that he concentrate on developing a keener interest in the discussion in progress. This may help him to find the perfectly natural and obvious question to ask—one that will aid, rather than obstruct, the discussion.

One attribute of the conference leader that cannot be classified as a mental qualification may, nevertheless, have a decided bearing on the success of his or her meetings. Although we assume that any discussion leader will be reasonably well dressed, there are certain factors of *appropriateness* in the leader's clothing, grooming, and jewelry to be considered, as well as certain unfortunate mannerisms, the display

of which may detract from the results obtained by the leader in conducting discussion.

The conference leader should be as well dressed as any member of his group, but not noticeably better dressed than the average of that group. If the group is made up of those who are habitually fastidious in niceties of clothing, grooming, and jewelry, it would be unfortunate if the leader were careless in these matters. On the other hand, if the conference group should be made up of workingmen in overalls, it would be ridiculous for the conference leader also to put on overalls. But it is equally out of order for him to affect any extreme niceties in grooming and jewelry, or to wear clothing that will create antagonism between his group members and himself.

Unless the leader is personally well known to the group members, he should never wear any type of fraternal insignia when leading a discussion. Particularly is this important when the leader is constantly meeting with groups the members of which are strangers to him. If the entire group, and the leader as well, belong to the same organization, there would be no objection to wearing fraternal insignia when leading the meeting. But there have been too many instances of antagonism and discord resulting from a conference leader's display of a pin or a ring that affected certain elements of his group as a red flag once was supposed to affect a bull.

The unfortunate mannerisms just referred to are those exhibited to some degree by all of us, but usually without our realizing it. The following in-

complete list of unpleasant mannerisms was developed by the simple expedient of asking a number of persons for examples of mannerisms that distressed them when observed in others. The conference leader will do well to check himself on these and other mannerisms, or to have someone else check them for him as he leads a conference. Some of these mannerisms are, of course, offensive only to certain individuals, and then, perhaps, only at certain times.

#### UNPLEASANT MANNERISMS <sup>1</sup>

1. Drumming with the fingers or a pencil on the table.
2. Standing on one foot.
3. Leaning on the back of a chair.
4. Leaning against the wall.
5. When seated, supporting the head on the hand.
6. Putting the hands to the face.
7. Chewing a pencil, toothpick, or match.
8. Tapping the teeth with a pencil.
9. Wetting the lips with the tongue.
10. Scratching the head.
11. Erasing the blackboard with the fingers.
12. Smoothing the hair.
13. Stroking the mustache.
14. Twisting a watch chain or charm.
15. Buttoning or unbuttoning the coat.
16. Frowning.
17. Biting the nails.
18. Biting the lips.
19. Chewing gum.
20. Cleaning the fingernails.
21. Adjusting spectacles.
22. Looking over spectacles.

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from the author's book, "Employee Training," published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942.

23. Tapping the foot on the floor.
24. Snapping the fingers.
25. Nervously drawing meaningless diagrams on paper while talking.
26. Nervously folding or tearing paper.
27. Staring into space while talking to the group.
28. Rattling keys or money in a pocket.
29. Thumbs in the armhole of the vest.
30. Keeping the hands in pockets.
31. Twisting a ring on a finger.
32. Slipping the fingers inside the collar.
33. It sometimes happens that the conference leader develops an unpleasant trick in smiling, which leaves the group with the impression that the leader is smiling at them, rather than with them. This may be entirely unintentional with the conference leader, but the effect on the group members is the same as if the conference leader were enjoying a joke at their expense.

It would be unreasonable to assume that any conference leader will successfully analyze his own shortcomings, either in the matter of possible unpleasant mannerisms, or, for that matter, in any department of conference leadership. If, as is customary, the leader has a secretary in attendance at his meetings, it may be that this is the one who can be most helpful in observing and making note of such points as the leader requests. In this way, without having to give thought himself to the matter during the conference, the leader may discover any mannerisms of his that have an unpleasant effect upon particular persons in his group. Then he may take steps toward ridding himself of such drawbacks.

As regards the correction of other indications of lack of leadership technique, the conference leader will do well to be guided by results. If he fails to create interest in discussion, or if group members misbehave, or if the conference situation gets completely out of control, or if any of a dozen other things go wrong, the leader must apply the remedies suggested in the pages that follow. These are based on experience, and will work in practice. Most poor conferences suffer from the leader's having overlooked a minor point or so in technique, rather than from his being entirely wrong in procedure. With a little attention to the detail of leadership methods, there is no reason why any person whose duties include the conduct of conferences should not quickly learn to lead resultful meetings.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ELEMENTS OF THE CONFERENCE

For good and sufficient reason a group of people have gathered together. They wish to discuss certain problems and, through the means of thoughtful discussion, solve them. As a result of the agreement reached at this conference, action will be taken by this group that will affect the fortunes of those present at the meeting, and perhaps influence, as well, the lives of others who are not in attendance.

The people of this group have selected you to act as the leader of the discussion that is about to take place.

Assuming ideal conditions, let us suppose that the meeting is to occur in a commodious conference room, well lighted and properly ventilated, quiet, and free from all possibility of interruption. The members of the group have seated themselves in comfortable chairs around a table large enough to accommodate easily the score of persons present.

You have been selected as the leader of this conference for one of a number of reasons. If it is a business or professional conference, you may be the superior of those present. Or you may be the chairman of a committee, or a teacher, or the leader of a neighborhood civic group. In any case, the occasion is important to these people, or they would not

be here. They would like to leave this room, an hour or so hence, feeling that they have accomplished something. The responsibility for this accomplishment, as well as for everything else that occurs during the conference, rests entirely upon you.

This group is interested in your opinions on the subject for discussion, but it does not wish to be controlled by your expressed ideas, even though you are the superior of its members in organization rank. It wants to arrive at its own conclusions. The members want to have their individual say, and they want their expressed opinions to be given due consideration when any conclusions are reached. Particularly, these people are here, not to listen to a lecture from you or anyone else, but to participate in a free, open, and reasonably impartial discussion.

As you seat yourself at the head of the table, you size up your group. Whether or not you have ever met these people before, your experience in leading many conferences tells you about what to expect from various individuals before you.

Unless the group has had previous unpleasant contact either with you or with poorly conducted conferences generally, the attitude of the majority of those present will be obviously friendly. By their speech, their smiles, and their general deportment, you know that the greater part of the group is "with" you, at least at the opening of the conference. This is a situation altogether in your favor.

Aside from those who are friendly, however, there may be, and probably are, certain individuals pres-

ent who will prove problematical before this meeting is over. The latter may range in attitude all the way from skepticism regarding the worth of the meeting about to ensue, to downright hostility toward you and the meeting in general. Usually, but not always, such unfriendly members are attending the meeting perforce. They may be there for the avowed purpose of making it as difficult as possible for you to conduct a resultful conference. It is a mistake for the leader ever to assume that a strange group will be cooperative from the outset.

Even among the friendly group members, however, there may be two or three who will cause you trouble before this conference is over. In every group there is at least one talkative individual who, perhaps with the best intentions in the world, wants to participate more frequently than anyone else. This person often sincerely believes that his opinions are superior to those of his confreres and is only trying to help, even though he may ruin the discussion by hogging it. The too-talkative individual will require special treatment if the conference is to be successful.

Then there will always be one or more sphinxes present. Sometimes these silent ones refrain from talking through shyness. Sometimes they simply cannot think of anything to say. They will not actively obstruct the progress of the meeting, but if too many of them are present they will have a wet-blanket effect on the proceedings. If they are friendly and silent, their presence is not so bad; but if they are hostile and silent, their presence at



your meeting may require an early exhibition of leadership technique on your part shortly after the conference has begun.

I have here mentioned a few of the unpleasant features that may be encountered in almost any conference group, at your first meeting with that group. If you enter this conference on the lookout for difficult situations, and can recognize them and apply corrective procedure as soon as they arise, your future meetings with the group will be increasingly pleasant and worth while. If, on the other hand, you enter this opening conference with a bland confidence that your friendly personality and capacity for witty repartee will see you through any situation that may develop, you may be all set to turn in a very poor job of conference conducting.

It is *fear of loss of control of the conference situation* that is responsible for most mistakes made by embryo conference leaders. And this fear is based on ignorance of the proper procedure to adopt when things go unexpectedly wrong, perhaps at the very start of the meeting. If a particular conference group is mishandled in one conference, there will be difficulty in getting results at future meetings with that group—at least, until corrective measures have been applied.

In considering the proper methods to employ in meeting unfortunate conference situations, let us proceed with our suppositional meeting. As untoward situations develop in this conference, we will apply in each case the proper remedy, or remedies.

The meeting is called to order. This must never be done by pounding on the table with a gavel. Instead, some such statement as "Gentlemen, shall we begin?" should be made in a sufficiently loud tone of voice to penetrate the casual conversation that always precedes the opening of a meeting. (Also, remember to open a meeting on the exact hour set for it, whether or not everyone expected is present. This is especially important when you are to lead a number of meetings with this group, since only in this way can straggling be discouraged and punctuality achieved.)

The opening remarks of the conference leader should be brief and concise. They should, in the fewest possible words, set the stage for the discussion of the first problem to be brought before the meeting. Altogether, the leader's introductory statements should never take up more than 5 minutes; 2 or 3 minutes is an even better allotment of time for this part of the meeting.

The reason for such brevity of introduction must be understood. During these moments the group is functioning as an audience. Its members are passively listening to you. This is exactly the opposite of the conference situation, in which everyone is expected to take part in the meeting. And the longer you talk at the opening of a conference, the more deeply will the group sink into a state of passivity, and the harder will become your effort to arouse them, once you have finished talking and are ready for the discussion meeting really to begin.

At the close of your introductory remarks you

will at once put before the group the first problem to be considered and solved. This problem will be put in the form of a question. The discussion question may state two or more opposing ideas and ask that a choice be made between them. Or it may simply raise a question to which the group is expected to supply one or more answers. If the question is a long one, with many angles to it, or if it is otherwise involved, you would do well to have on hand typed copies of it, and to pass these out just before reading the question to the group. That is a common procedure in conducting training conferences, and can often be employed to advantage in other types of conference. The members of the group must know exactly of what the problem consists before they can do anything with it, and a long-drawn-out question presented orally can necessitate so much memorizing as to be quite confusing.

After putting the opening discussion question to the group, say nothing more until some group member responds. Keep quiet, even though a deathly hush falls over the group for as much as a full minute. If you wait them out, someone will speak, and the ice will be broken. If, while the group is mulling over the question, you get the impression that the question was not clearly stated and begin nervously to rephrase it, you are seriously weakening your position as the leader of that group. Remember, this question may present an entirely new idea to the group and the members cannot discuss it until they have had an opportunity to *think*. If the question has been delivered orally and is not

clear to the group members, they will tell you so. Then, if at all, is the time to repeat the question.

As soon as they have had time to think, the group members will begin to respond. First one and then another will express an opinion. As each response is received, you, as the leader, will acknowledge the member's contribution, indicating approval of the fact that the member has participated, *but with no slightest indication as to whether or not you are in sympathy with the ideas expressed in the contribution.*

Such display of impartiality is necessary if the leader is to promote a free and open discussion of the question before the group. Once the leader has indicated, by word, inflection, or gesture, his personal bias on the subject, his chances of developing an honest, thoughtful consideration of the problem become very small. In such an instance, the conference results in a battle between a section of the group on one side, and the remainder of the group *and* the leader, on the other side. The effect is the same as that observed in a football game in which the officials are apparently biased. Except when leading by the "negative" method, as later explained, make every effort to appear entirely impartial throughout the conference, no matter how strongly you favor one side or the other.

If you say something like "That's a good idea," or even just nod, you have acknowledged the response and given the group member credit for having made it, yet without indicating your agreement with the sense of the response. Giving credit is

important, since it motivates not only this member, but others, to participate. One hundred per cent participation—everybody offering an idea at least once during the conference—is a very desirable situation in any discussion meeting.

If responses to the first discussion question are slow in coming, there is a temptation for the leader to begin calling on individual group members for their ideas on the subject. Some amateur leaders even go so far as to ask for opinions from the members from left to right in rotation around the table.

Calling on group members for responses is strictly taboo at any time and under any circumstances. Don't ever do it, if your aim is to lead good conferences. To appreciate the uselessness of this procedure you have only to recollect some occasion when you have been a member of such a group and some embryo leader has "put you on the spot" by calling on you for a response. You were not ready to speak and had nothing important to contribute to the discussion at the moment or you would have spoken of your own accord. When thus called on, you probably muttered something about "agreeing with the last speaker," and sat there feeling a little foolish, and resentful too, though without quite understanding why you felt that way.

Group members will participate without being called on whenever their interest in the subject and their desire to take part in the discussion become sufficiently strong. Your job is to heighten this interest and strengthen this desire by employing correct leadership technique. Much of this book is

given over to suggestions which, if followed, will result in conferences in which everyone present will participate freely without being called on.

When you have had three or four responses to your first discussion question, you are ready to insert your first follow-up question into the discussion. Follow-up questions, unlike the discussion questions, are purely extemporaneous in nature. They are of the greatest importance to the success of the conference. Indeed, it may be said that the difference between a good conference leader and a poor conference leader usually lies in the quality of the follow-up questions employed by each, and in the timing of these questions.

An experienced conference leader may have some idea, when he plans a conference, of the general trend his follow-up questions will take. But the exact wording of these questions, and the exact point in the discussion at which they will be inserted, cannot be determined in advance.

Follow-up questions must be short and snappy, in order that they may not interrupt the discussion. Perhaps the most common and the most effective follow-up question ever employed is the simple query "Why?" Properly timed, the delivery of this question will promote thoughtful exploration of any subject to a greater depth than would otherwise occur.

Always base your follow-up questions on the discussion itself. In order to do this you must be keenly interested in the discussion. You must be following every word of it, while at the same time

you are *thinking* just a little bit *ahead* of it. Therefore, you are ready with the obvious follow-up question at the exact moment when it will do the most good.

A good follow-up question will be so simple and obvious that anyone present at the meeting might have asked it if he had only thought quickly enough. Indeed, I have observed conferences in which the best follow-up questions were asked by group members, rather than by the leader. This, however, is not good, from the standpoint of the respect of the group for their leader, and therefore from the viewpoint of the leader's control of the conference situation. The conference leader should ask the follow-up questions.

Follow-up questions, besides filling their vital function as stimulators of thought and discussion, also may be employed to impart *direction* to a discussion. In some conferences it is desirable that the conclusions reached by the group coincide with the preconceived opinion of the leader. This is not ordinarily true, but when the necessity exists the result usually can be attained without much difficulty. Briefly, this is accomplished by selecting from among a number of responses that one which most nearly embodies the thought that the leader would like to see emphasized in the discussion. On this particular response the follow-up question is based, thereby directing the attention of the group away from the other and (in the leader's estimation) less desirable responses. More will be said of this technique later, but it should be pointed out here that, in general,

the very best conferences are those in which little directional effect is imparted to follow-up questions.

Our conference now progresses as follows: A good, thought-provoking discussion question has been properly presented to the group. This question elicits a number of responses, none of which perhaps shows very deep thought on the subject. The leader acknowledges these responses without indicating his personal prejudice.

The sense of the responses received differs more or less. Some are nearly in agreement; others are almost diametrically opposed. If, as is usually the case, the leader is interested only in exploring the subject as deeply as possible in order that the *truth* shall be discovered, he will ask successive follow-up questions to encourage further thought and discussion of *all* distinctive ideas that have been volunteered—not just the ones with which he personally happens to be in agreement.

As the meeting continues it will be found that the group is tending to divide along two or more ideological lines. The leader will do everything possible to accentuate this difference of opinion. Statements on his part such as "Then you do not agree with Mr. Blank?" help to make this cleavage clean-cut. The leader wants a sharp difference of opinion to exist throughout the body of the discussion. The best conferences are those in which there exists definite conflict of divergent ideas.

A conference in which everyone present is in agreement is no conference at all. Difference of opinion is essential, and to a considerable degree



the success of the conference depends on the sharpness of this difference and the vehemence with which opposing ideas are defended during the discussion. A red-hot discussion will provoke thought and attain results. A tame, sedate discussion results from lack of interest; and, further, is an indication of lack of thought on the subject under consideration. Such a meeting does little good, as far as developing new ideas is concerned. And it is in the development of new ideas, under the stimulus of competitive effort, that the conference excels.

As soon as the discussion is well under way, the leader should begin to give a part of his attention to clearing up a few matters that are tending to slow up the meeting. The first of these, most likely, will be the necessity for suppressing the self-expression of some too-verbose group member. This fellow wishes to do as much talking as all the others in the group combined; and no matter how clever he is or how good a talker he may be, he will inevitably wreck your conference if you do not quiet him. If you have two such discussion hogs in your group it will be difficult for any of the other members to get into the discussion at all, particularly if the two verbose ones happen to hold opposing ideas on the subject under consideration. When this occurs you will find yourself conducting a meeting in which two members are doing all the talking, and even you, the leader, may have difficulty in getting in a word now and then.

Obviously, the too-talkative group member must be squelched. He must be restrained from talking

by gentle means, if this is possible; but if it is not, then by whatever other means, short of actual gagging, may be required. Begin by encouraging the remainder of the group to talk. Do not call on anyone for a contribution to the discussion, but rebuke the group as a whole for permitting one (or two) of its number to do all the talking. This is a not-too-subtle suggestion to Mr. Verbose to quiet down and give someone else a chance to talk. If he takes the hint, well and good. If he does not (and if he is a dyed-in-the-wool talker he will not remain quiet for long), then it will be necessary for you to try even less subtle measures on this group member.

In such a situation the leader is justified in directly requesting the talkative member, or members, to remain quiet for a while. Sometimes, when the meeting is the first of a series, it is possible to avoid this measure, and to have a private talk with the group member before the next meeting convenes. Usually, however, there will come a time when to crack down hard on such an individual is unavoidable. When this occurs, do a good job of it the first time so that a second or a third clash may not be required. It is possible to make most reasonable people see that their continuous talking is defeating the very purpose of the conference, which is a free interchange of ideas on the part of all group members. Obviously, if one person takes more than his share of the time, others whose opinions may be even more valuable (and this point may be sharply emphasized in your rebuke) will not have an opportunity to express themselves. Squelch the ver-

bose individual by polite means, if possible, but squelch him somehow, and quickly.

After you have taken care of the too-talkative group member you may find other matters requiring your attention, in addition to your interest in the discussion itself. In an opening conference of a series, for example, there may well be present one or more members who are not in sympathy with the purpose of the meeting, who take every opportunity to make their feelings evident. This happens most frequently in employee training conferences, where attendance may be compulsory.

Usually, resistance of this sort is based on misunderstanding. If its outward manifestations are ignored by the leader until the member has had an opportunity to change his mind as to the value of the meetings, this condition may correct itself before the end of the first meeting of the series. Any open clash with the protesting individual in this meeting would be unfortunate and should be avoided if possible.

If the recalcitrant member shows his resentment by remaining silent, it is a simple matter to ignore his unfriendly attitude. If, however, he is not content with this but seizes every opportunity to participate, the situation can become exceedingly difficult for everyone present. Frequently the contributions of such a person to the discussion are of an obstructionist character, designed to hinder rather than to be helpful.

In such a case, the leader will do well to ignore completely every remark of this uncooperative

group member, giving him no credit for having spoken and at times even interrupting his comment to put to the group a follow-up question pertaining to recent responses made by other members. The group soon will appreciate the situation, and if—as is usually the case—the majority of its members are not in sympathy with the actions of the one or two obstructionists present, the other speakers also will tend to ignore the responses of the obstreperous ones. By following this procedure, the leader may avoid an open break during the first meeting. At the close of this meeting he can decide whether such treatment will suffice, or whether it will be wise to have a talk with the troublemakers before the next meeting. If properly handled, cases of this sort will result in the conversion of the recalcitrant minority into cooperative participants in the group discussions.

Having taken care of the too-talkative and the obstreperous group members, the leader can continue the conference with some assurance of accomplishing something. He will apply every motivation necessary to draw the silent members into the discussion. His follow-up questions will become increasingly thought provoking as the conference progresses. The group will really warm up to its job and individual responses will show much more thought than at first.

Assume that the first discussion question requires an hour for proper consideration. Every 15 minutes or so, interrupt the proceedings to make a brief summation of the points that have been brought out

in the discussion up to that time. Make this summary an entirely fair one, in which you bring out equally the essential arguments of both the pros and the cons. Avoid coloring in any way your summations with your personal opinions. This is the time to prove that you are what you must be if you are to lead successful conferences—a fair and impartial leader, interested only in determining the truth of the matter under discussion.

The purpose of the occasional summation is to avoid rehashing arguments that have already been made. At the close of such a summary it is as though the leader said, "Now we've finished with these arguments. Let's have some new ones." And this is exactly what happens. The thinking goes ahead from that point, and brand-new ideas are developed—ideas usually advanced with the intention of bolstering up the previous arguments of the member who offers them.

About halfway through the discussion it may happen that one or more group members will experience a change of heart. After hearing the arguments on both sides of the question, these members may volunteer that they wish to reverse the position they took at the opening of the discussion and join forces with the opposition.

If this should occur, by all means encourage the members in making their about-face, complimenting them for their show of open-mindedness in reversing their expressed convictions. This is important, since the purpose of a real conference, unlike that of the radio forum, is not merely to encourage a few

people to air their more or less authoritative views on a particular subject. Out of this discussion there must come instead something approaching unanimity of opinion on the part of the entire group, and this may call for a definite about-face on the part of certain group members from the stand they took at the opening of the discussion. If the leader encourages open-mindedness he will have a display of it in his conferences, and this is helpful in developing that spirit of give-and-take which is so essential to arrival at a workable conclusion for any discussion question.

When the leader is convinced that the group has extracted everything of value from the discussion of the question before it, and the members appear ready to arrive at a final decision, a last summation should be made. In this summation the leader must epitomize the principal ideas that have been developed on each side of the question throughout the entire conference. Then the question should be at once put to a vote for decision, the vote being taken simply by a showing of hands. Usually the vote will split two ways; sometimes there may be three or more choices offered to the group. Once a vote has been taken, no further discussion on that question ever should be permitted.

If the conference has been properly conducted, a majority vote may be taken to indicate the solution of the problem that is best *for that group at that time*. Therefore, the majority opinion may be safely put into practice. It is on this principle that

all conference training, and all business and professional conferences, are based. It is dangerous to assume, however, that the decision of one conference group can or should be made binding on other groups.

It is well to remind a group from time to time that nothing worth while would be accomplished in a conference were it not for the efforts of those representing the minority opinion. Just as the use of a discussion question that is entirely one-sided never will promote good discussion, so a group in which everyone wishes to be on the "winning" side never will delve very deeply into the truth of a problem. From the conference leader's viewpoint, a reliable "anti"—one of those people who can be depended on to oppose almost any spoken expression of opinion—is a valuable asset in any group. Such an individual can make a majority work to win its decision, and often singlehanded will force them to inquire much more deeply into a subject than they otherwise would. In exceptional instances, he may swing the remainder of an entire group over to his side of the argument.

We have now discussed procedure that is common to any conference, with any group, and on any subject. This routine procedure forms the framework for the discussion. If the leader will furnish the questions to be considered by the group, and then follow the general leadership technique I have suggested, his conferences will be successful. Since the real meat of the conference lies in the discussion

questions, we will now consider methods of planning a meeting in order that the leader may be assured of having plenty of thought-provoking material on hand at the opening of any meeting he may be called on to conduct.



## CHAPTER III

### PLANNING THE CONFERENCE

Before entering the conference room the leader of a discussion group must plan in detail the meeting he is to conduct. If he is an experienced leader he will spend some time in planning carefully every phase of the conference that lies just ahead. Much of the difference between the conference that is boring to its members and completely devoid of worth-while results, and the other sort of conference—one that is interesting, inspirational, and resultful—lies in the degree of preparation made by the leader for the meeting in question.

The novice conference leader needs the most thorough preparation before he is ready to lead a meeting, and usually he is the one who makes the least preparation. Sometimes it would seem that the man or woman who has the least capacity for quick-witted action is the one most likely to attempt to lead a discussion without having given a thought to the possible emergencies that may arise in that conference.

Control of the conference situation, as we have seen, is often rather a tenuous matter. The difference between a discussion group under control and one completely out of control may be very small. It is for this reason that more planning is required to

lead a conference than is required either to conduct a parliamentary meeting or to make a speech. In each of the latter situations control is inherently much stronger than in the conference.

There are two phases to planning for a conference. In the first of these you prepare the physical conditions for the meeting. After you have satisfied yourself that the conference room and its seating arrangements, air conditioning, and lighting are as they should be, and that there will be a minimum of extraneous noise and chance for interruptions, you are ready to plan the meeting itself.

I reiterate the need for carefully checking the physical arrangements for the meeting because I have found that this is the matter of least concern to many embryo conference leaders. Some of these men and women do a good job of preparing discussion material for the conference, and yet will open their meetings under such deplorable physical conditions as to constitute an almost insurmountable handicap right at the outset. If the group is uncomfortable because of inadequate chairs, table, or lighting arrangements, or if the air is bad, or if there is too much extraneous noise, or if there are too many interruptions by telephone and word-of-mouth messages, during the meeting; if the leader has forgotten to bring certain necessary charts or papers, or if there is no blackboard or chalk at hand when needed—any *one* of these shortcomings can detract from the success of a conference. Yet I have attended meetings—and so, no doubt, have you

—in which *all* these elements of poor physical arrangement presented obstacles to success.

The expert conference leader is as careful of the physical conditions for his meeting as is the tight-rope walker of the condition of his rope before he trusts his life to it. In neither case can this inspection be left to someone else. The leader must make his own check of conditions in the conference room before any group member arrives for the conference.

The need for careful planning of the procedure for an open discussion meeting should be evident. In the meeting conducted according to parliamentary procedure, the leader needs only to follow the rules laid down for the conduct of such a conference, and the meeting must perforce proceed in orderly fashion, whether or not anything of importance is accomplished at the session. In the case of the public address, the speaker usually may assume a quiescent audience and concentrate his attention solely on the composition of the ideas he intends to expound in his lecture.

In an open discussion meeting, however, there are no intricate conventional rules of order. The group may say or do just about anything it wishes, subject only to its respect for the leader and the skill with which this leader directs the meeting. It is this very freedom of action, indeed, that makes the open meeting so much more productive of results, when compared to the parliamentary session. Or, if the comparison is to be made with the public address, we find the speaker concerned only with the

preparation of the words he will speak, while the conference leader is engrossed in forecasting the words that will be spoken by a score of people engaged in heated discussion.

At first glance it may appear impossible to determine in advance what any group engaged in open discussion will say. As far as the exact words uttered are concerned, it is not possible so to prognosticate, but the conference leader is primarily interested in the development, in his group, of ideas and trains of thought. These can be forecast and controlled by the leader of a free and open discussion meeting. But it is necessary that the leader give real thought beforehand to the preparation of some sort of written plan for the meeting he is about to conduct.

In planning the conference procedure, you may need a detailed outline, in which everything you expect to say and do is listed, or you may need but a few notes. In general, the longer you have been leading conferences, the less plan you will require and the more elaborate plan you will prepare.

Certain things you must have firmly fixed in your mind when you open your meeting. If you have them before you on paper, there is less likelihood of your forgetting some of them, and thereby detracting from the value of the conference. Your plan should include, as a minimum, the following points:

1. The aim or purpose of the conference.
2. An outline of your introductory remarks.
3. A list of those questions and notes that are

to be employed in the body, or developmental section, of the conference.

4. Notes on your concluding remarks, together with any reminders or assignments that this group must receive just before the conference is adjourned.

The foregoing is the irreducible minimum for a conference plan to be used in a training conference. It is usually spoken of as a four-stage plan, embracing as its four steps, Aim, Introduction, Development, and Conclusion. If it is made up with careful attention to detail, and particularly if the leader has the ability to foresee contingencies and meet them in this plan before they arise in conference, the four-stage plan is sufficient guidance for the leader in any conference.

In conducting employee training conferences, however, in which dramatizations are employed as part of the training procedure, it is not uncommon for leaders to prepare a seven-stage plan in advance of the conference. This plan lists:

1. Aim.
2. Motivation.
3. Materials.
4. Introduction.
5. Development.
6. Application.
7. Assignment.

The seven-stage conference plan substitutes Assignment for the Conclusion of the four-stage plan,

and adds the sections Motivation, Materials, and Application. When the seven-stage plan is used, the leader lists under Motivation the exact desires, wishes, or other emotions of the group to which he expects to appeal throughout this conference (see Chap. V).

Under Materials is listed all instructional equipment—blackboard, charts, etc.—that will be needed during the meeting. (A materials list is worth making up even when you are using a four-stage conference plan. Habitual use of such a list obviates the unpleasant situation in which the leader finds he has forgotten to bring to the meeting something so important that the conference must be recessed while he secures it.)

Under Application is listed everything that has to do with the presentation, rating, and discussion of the dramatization to be used as an instructional aid. The Assignment in a training conference plan covers, of course, material comparable to that issued in the assignment made by an instructor to any academic class.

In order to get a clear picture of the planned conference as opposed to the catch-as-catch-can proceedings in the meeting for which no plan has been prepared, let us consider in some detail the seven stages of the more elaborate plan, and then apply this information in outlining a conference. After that it will be simple to convert the seven-stage plan into a four-stage plan, which may be used in any business or training conference.

*Aim:* Under Aim you must state, simply and concisely, exactly what you expect to accomplish in the meeting in question. Usually there will be no difficulty whatever in making such a statement of the purpose of the conference. If, however, you find yourself confused at this point, it will be because you have no clear idea of why this meeting is being held. In such case, you must clarify your thinking on this point before going ahead with the preparation of your plan; otherwise there can be no unity to your conference.

There may be more than one possible aim for any conference, and if this is true, all such aims must be stated in the plan. Usually one aim will be your major objective, and the others will be minor objectives. This also should be stated.

*Motivation:* Under this heading list those desires of the group members to which you may reasonably appeal in this meeting. The more difficult it is to think of the proper motivation to apply in a particular instance, the more essential it is that you hit on the proper motivation for that group before the opening of the meeting. In your plan you merely state the motivation you will apply. In Chap. V you will find directions for applying various forms of motivation.

*Materials:* Here you will list all materials needed for the presentation of your conference. With such a list prepared well in advance of the meeting, it is possible for you or an assistant to gather these items together just before you go into the conference room.

A little forehandedness here may save you much embarrassment after the meeting has opened.

*Introduction:* In preparing this very important section of the conference plan, I like to write out the few opening remarks in full. If the meeting is one of a series, the first comment will refer to something that occurred at the previous meeting, something that will tie in that meeting with the present one. Succeeding remarks will be designed to start the group thinking along the lines of your opening discussion question, as listed under Development. The final question or statement used in your introduction must preface the opening discussion question.

*Development:* Here are listed the discussion questions you will require during the body of the meeting. In this period the real work of the conference will be accomplished. Many new ideas will be developed by the group. This section of the conference plan contains, in addition to the discussion questions, the subheading "Comment" following each discussion question. Under Comment you list all suggestions that you feel may prove helpful to you when the conference is actually in session. These suggestions may include a statement of what you expect to accomplish in the discussion, and also some possible follow-up questions for which opportunity may be afforded. In preparing this section of the plan, it is well to include an abundance of material for discussion. If too much is prepared it is not difficult to leave some of this material untouched. On the other hand, it is very unpleasant



to find yourself running short of material well before the close of a meeting of scheduled length.

*Application:* This heading will be used only when there is some application made in this conference of the new ideas developed in the foregoing step of the plan. Ordinarily this will occur only in a training conference, and most frequently this application will then take the form of a dramatization, as discussed in connection with the conference plan to follow.

*Assignment:* In this section of the plan is listed the final word that is to be given to the group just before it is dismissed. In a training conference, or in a committee meeting, this may take the form of a definite assignment to be carried out by the group members before the date of the next meeting. Even in a business conference there may well be certain orders that the discussion leader (who probably is the superior of the group members present) will wish to give to his subordinates regarding methods of carrying out ideas that have been developed in the conference. In such a meeting, it sometimes is advisable for the leader to make notes for an assignment of this kind, even while the discussion is in progress.

In order to illustrate the foregoing outline of a seven-stage conference plan, I have selected the plan for a bona fide training conference, in which the employees of a public utility organization decide what constitutes proper personal appearance for a public contact employee of that company.

Here is the seven-stage conference plan:

## PLAN FOR CONFERENCE

*Subject:* APPEARANCE1. *Aim:*

The purpose of this meeting is to develop discussion on the matter of personal appearance of public contact employees. It is intended that this discussion shall be sufficiently exhaustive to cover every detail of appearance, with the thought that the employee who is careless in this respect will have an opportunity to hear what others think of his carelessness. No direct criticism of any individual employee will be made.

2. *Motivation:*

The desire of every public contact employee to present a pleasing appearance in details of dress, grooming, jewelry, and mannerisms. The fear of censure for being improperly dressed for the job. The fear of appearing ludicrous. The fear of giving offense to others—referring particularly to the factors of grooming and mannerisms.

3. *Materials:*

Blackboard, crayons, and eraser. Twenty copies of Standard Practice Questions on Information. Twenty copies of dramatization rating sheet. This conference plan.

4. *Introduction:*

a. "In our previous eight meetings we have discussed all the elements of personal service except

Appearance. Today we will discuss this element, Appearance, in considerable detail.

b. "I believe most of us present a good appearance in contacting the customer, but there are certain points in connection with clothing, grooming, jewelry, and mannerisms upon which there seems to be a difference of opinion among us as to what makes the best appearance.

c. "We will start the discussion with a question that should help us to clear up some of these points under the first item I have just mentioned—clothing."

#### 5. Development:

a. *First Discussion Question*: "In your opinion, what constitutes appropriate clothing for a public contact employee in our Section? (1) For women? (2) For men?"

*Comment*: This question should develop a very detailed discussion of appropriate and inappropriate clothing. Confine the discussion to *clothing only*, since other elements of appearance will be considered later in this meeting. In discussing women's clothing, the following should come out, pro or con: sport clothes, sleeveless dresses, tight dresses, low-necked dresses, no hose, color harmony. Many other points should arise also, but the foregoing should be developed by the leader, if they do not come out in the discussion.

In discussing men's clothing bring out these matters: sport clothes, shirt sleeves, well-pressed and well-cleaned clothing, linen, and any other points that you wish to hear discussed.

Two good follow-up questions that may help to promote discussion are "What clothing is *inappropriate*

for wear in our Section?" and "Would a uniform be desirable for any employees in our Section?" These questions to be used if and when they fit properly into the discussion.

Try to create real difference of opinion in this discussion of clothing.

*b. Second Discussion Question:* "What do you consider inappropriate grooming for public contact employees in our Section? (1) For women? (2) For men?"

*Comment:* This discussion should create considerable difference of opinion. In the discussion on women's grooming, bring out these points: hairdress, including henna and blondined hair; cosmetics; extreme plucked eyebrows; perfume; nail tinting; extremely long nails; appearance of teeth; breath and body odors. For men: marcelled hair, hair trim, shaving, dandruff, types of mustache, nails, appearance of teeth, breath and body odors.

*c. Third Discussion Question:* "What jewelry is appropriate for public contact employees in our Section? (1) For women? (2) For men?"

*Comment:* This question should bring out some interesting discussion on the appropriateness of certain types of jewelry for wear by public contact employees. The follow-up question, "What jewelry is inappropriate?" if properly used, may aid in developing ideas from the group. Also the question, "Is there any objection to the wearing of fraternal insignia by public contact employees?" may develop considerable discussion.

The discussion of women's jewelry should include earrings, bracelets, rings, watches, etc. In the discussion of men's jewelry include wrist watches, rings, scarf pins, etc.

*d. Fourth Discussion Question:* "What mannerisms in a public contact employee are objectionable to you?"

*Comment:* There should be little difficulty in developing a sufficient number of objectionable mannerisms from your group. Encourage discussion as to whether or not mannerisms developed from group members are really objectionable to the remainder of the group.

*e. Fifth Discussion Question:* "Under what circumstances is it permissible for an employee to drink alcoholic beverages while on duty?"

*Comment:* It is believed that this question may properly be discussed under "Appearance" on account of the effect of an alcoholic breath on certain types of customers. While it is not expected that any employees in these groups will admit drinking on duty, it is believed that a good discussion on this subject may make an employee appreciate the effect of this in a public contact and cause him to hesitate to drink at any time while on duty.

#### 6. *Application (Dramatization):*

- a.* Pass out dramatization rating sheets.
- b.* Have dramatization presented.
- c.* Allow group to rate the dramatized contact, insisting that each employee rate individually, without consulting with other employees.
- d.* Conduct discussion of dramatization as in previous conferences.

#### 7. *Assignment:*

- a.* Issue Standard Practice Questions on Information to the group.

b. Announce that these meetings will continue on a monthly basis, and that the group will be notified of the date for the next meeting.

c. Dismiss.

For the ordinary business conference or club committee meeting, a seven-stage plan will not be required. In the first place, the dramatization will not appear as a part of such a meeting. Then, as the leader becomes more familiar with the practical application of motivation in group discussion, the selection of proper motivation becomes almost intuitive with him. Thus Application and Motivation may be removed as steps in building a conference plan.

The heading Materials, as the third step of the seven-stage plan, may be eliminated except when an unusually large number of items are required for the proper presentation of the conference, and the paper thus will be reduced to a four-stage plan, most convenient in form and size for outlining the average business or professional conference.

An important reason why you should always make up a formal plan for every meeting you conduct is this: It so happens that the standard headings employed in your plan serve in themselves to remind you of the preparation that you must make in advance for a meeting, or later will wish you had made. Without these headings before you, it is quite possible to overlook preparation that is of vital importance.

It should be obvious that it may be necessary to

prepare more than one plan for identical material, when this material is to be used in groups the members of which differ sharply in experience and background. In such a case, the application of different motivation may be required, and it may be necessary to change somewhat the introductory material. As far as the discussion questions in Development are concerned, however, no changes should be indicated, at least as long as the subject matter comprising the questions is of such a nature as to be of equal interest to the various groups in which it is used. As an example of this, a discussion question that creates considerable interest in a foremanship training group usually creates equal interest when discussed by a group of higher executives in the same organization.

The best procedure in preparing a conference plan is first to draw up a set of discussion questions (as described in the following chapter), and then to write your plan around these questions. The discussion questions will, of course, form the nucleus of Development in the plan, and the remaining sections of the plan naturally revolve around Development. A particular plan should be written with the needs of a particular conference group in mind, and rewritten whenever the same material is to be covered in a different type of group. With slight alterations it is sometimes possible to use a standard conference plan for a wide variety of groups.

In planning an informal business conference for which the preparation of a four-stage conference plan appears too ambitious a proceeding, it is pos-

sible to epitomize a number of points for the leader's guidance on a 3 by 5 card. This is the minimum preparation permissible for any conference, and these notes, though brief, should nevertheless outline the introductory remarks, and all questions to be discussed in the meeting should be written out in full. When the leader knows exactly why he is calling the group into conference, he can draw up such a card plan in 10 minutes. The time thus spent will pay dividends in increased accomplishment in the meeting itself, since even in a 10-minute preparation the leader must devote some real thought both to the material he intends to present to the group for discussion and to the method he intends to use in conducting this discussion.



## CHAPTER IV

### DEVELOPING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As soon as any conference has convened and the leader has concluded his opening remarks, he must put before the group a question for discussion. This rule applies to any type of conference, called for any purpose whatsoever. Unless the group can get its collective teeth into a real problem within 5 minutes after the meeting has been called to order, the conference is likely to be just another one of those boring sessions for which there really is no excuse.

Whether the conference is a business departmental meeting, a club meeting, an employee training group, or a Sunday-school class, the leader must equip himself beforehand with a number of thought-provoking discussion questions for presentation to the group. These questions will, of course, be based on the subject for the discussion of which the meeting has been called. The leader must not wait until the conference has begun before attempting to formulate the exact wording of his first discussion question.

So much depends on the exact wording of a discussion question that every word employed in its structure must be carefully scrutinized and weighed. The various elements involved in the question must

be balanced one against the other. Only thus can a sure-fire, thought-provoking discussion question be built. Such careful construction cannot be carried out extemporaneously. Frequently I have spent as much as 8 hours preparing three or four discussion questions for an important conference.

The allotment of so much time to the preparation of discussion questions for the average business conference is, of course, ordinarily out of the question. Usually, the leader of such a conference knows exactly what questions will be discussed at his meeting. Nevertheless, he will do well to take the trouble to write out these questions beforehand, and pay some attention to the phraseology employed in each. In presenting even the most simple question to a conference group, it is possible, by carelessly wording the question, to create much confusion of thought in the group's attack on the problem.

A discussion question must be thought provoking. It can be thought provoking only if the solution to the problem it presents is not too obvious. Most poor discussion questions fail because they do not conform to this criterion. In these ineffective questions there is but one response possible, and when that has been given discussion ceases. Many of the best discussion questions are alternative questions: those in which two opposed ideas or two entirely different methods of procedure are outlined, the group being asked to express a choice between the two, and to give reasons for making their choice.

When an alternative question is poorly worded, one of the two ideas or methods presented is obvi-

ously so superior to the other that the entire group agrees at once on the better solution, with the obvious result that no discussion ensues. By the same token, a question in which the ideas or methods are more nearly balanced as to desirability will require more discussion, and a question in which they are almost, but not quite, exactly balanced will develop excellent discussion.

A conference leader frequently makes the mistake of assuming that he must write a discussion question one way for one group and another way for another group. Actually, there is very little difference between groups as far as the form of question that will interest them is concerned. For example, a group of factory foremen and a group of top-flight executives or college professors will react about the same to a given question, provided only that the question in each case is of interest to the various groups concerned. About the only difference between the reaction of one group and another to a discussion question will be the depth to which each group delves into the problem, and the speed with which a solution is reached.

Because of this factor of universality in a good discussion question, it is a constant source of surprise to me to note how poorly the average radio forum or round-table discussion is conducted. A properly planned and properly conducted radio round table could be made absorbingly interesting to everyone present, and it would be of equal interest to everyone listening to it. Each question propounded to the group would be discussed until

a definite agreement had been reached by the group regarding its merits. The conference group would be made up of men and women who really were searching for the truth, not of individual orators awaiting their turns to make speeches as long as the leader will permit, in order to air their own pet views on the subject under discussion. If, just once, an "authority" appearing on such a forum would admit that, as a result of the discussion, he had changed his mind on some question, I should feel that something good had come out of that conference. The only thing wrong with the radio round table is poor conference leadership. Some day that shortcoming will be rectified and this form of radio entertainment will become as popular as is the quiz program of today. It will be popular for the same reason that the quiz program is popular: because it gives people a rather rare opportunity to think along with the radio performers.

If an alternative discussion question is not well balanced, it will add nothing to the conference in which it is used. If many of the questions used in a conference are ill balanced, it would be better not to have assembled the group at all.

Here is an example of a poorly balanced alternative discussion question of a sort that might be employed in a supervisory training conference: "Two employees are being considered for promotion to a supervisory position. These employees are equally well qualified for the position, but *B* is a college graduate with 25 years' service, while *A* is a grammar-school graduate, with but 6 years' service.

Which employee, *A* or *B*, should be given the position?"

Obviously, on the strength of the information presented to the group in this question, the decision would go at once to employee *B*, and that would end the discussion. Such a question would not be worth presenting to any conference group.

In order to make a really thought-provoking alternative question out of this one, you must build up *A* or tear down *B*, or do both of these things. To compensate for his lack of a college education, *A* can be built up by giving him some qualifications not possessed by *B*. Suppose, to begin with, we give *A* a high-school education and, in addition, some study in correspondence courses. Now the gap between these men has been narrowed. But there are other things that can be done. Make *A* an older man, say, forty-three years of age, and give him 22 years of service with the company. Make *B* the younger, thirty years of age, and with but 6 years' service with the company. Let both men be married.

Now you are getting somewhere. Your discussion question reads: "You are considering two men for promotion to an important supervisory position. *A*, the elder, is forty-three years of age, married, and has 22 years of service with the company. He has a high-school education and has completed some correspondence courses. He is well liked by everyone in the organization, and is qualified to hold the position.

"*B*, the younger man, is thirty years of age, mar-

ried, and has but 6 years' service with the company. He has a college education, has shown exceptional ability, and is unusually well qualified to hold the position. Both men are now holding supervisory positions of minor rank.

"From the standpoint of employee satisfaction, the best interests of the company, and over-all efficiency, should *A* or *B* receive the promotion? Why?"

Now we have a well-balanced alternative discussion question—one, incidentally, that I have used many, many times in supervisory and executive training conferences. Apparently this question has all the elements essential to a sure-fire discussion question. It is well balanced. It presents a concrete case. It offers the group members a clearly defined alternative, insists that they make a choice, and then asks them to tell why they chose as they did. The problem presented is a common one in the experience of every industrial supervisor or executive. There is reason to believe that there will be a sharp difference of opinion on the question and, in all probability, that strong feeling will develop on both sides as the discussion progresses. There is nothing in the wording of the question to indicate the leader's preference in the matter, one way or the other. Of course, the question will be put to the group in such a way that there will be no indication, even by the inflection of his voice, of the leader's opinion.

Almost any problem that would ordinarily be put before a business conference can be developed as

an alternative discussion question. Which shall we do—this, or *this*? Perhaps even another pair of alternatives may be added, with a choice offered among the four solutions. But always there must be some good arguments in favor of each alternative or there will be no discussion, and hence no thought at all given to the problem.

The same discussion question may be used successfully either in a purely developmental conference or in a conference in which the leader wishes to sell to the group a particular method among those presented (Chap. VIII). In the one case the leader has no interest other than to get at the truth of the matter. In the discussion question just quoted, for example, the group's choice of the older or the younger man for promotion would depend solely on the inclination of the particular group in the matter. If the leader wished to secure an agreement in favor of either man, it would be necessary for him to influence the discussion in that direction, using methods that have been outlined elsewhere in these pages to care for such a contingency.

It should be clear that no good discussion question can properly be made leading, either in wording or inflection. Leading questions usually elicit yes-or-no replies, without further discussion from the group. The only exception to this occurs when the group members resent the leader's efforts thus to influence their thought, and show an inclination to argue the question with him. Unless the leader is deliberately attempting to lead negatively, he has then placed himself in the very undesirable posi-

tion of engaging in a controversy with the group rather than promoting discussion among the members of the group.

I have stated some of the criteria of a good alternative discussion question. Most of these factors apply, whether or not the discussion question presents an alternative to the group. Any discussion question, alternative or otherwise, must be thought provoking, and the problem presented must be one within the experience and understanding of the group. There must be nothing in the wording of the question to indicate a desired answer.

Not all good discussion questions present concrete cases. They may deal rather with abstract ideas. Such a question might be, "How would you distinguish between a leader and a driver of men?" Here the discussion must deal with abstractions, although it is possible to develop such a discussion into something concrete by encouraging the group members to illustrate their arguments with actual cases based on their own experience.

Sometimes a discussion question will develop into an excellent alternative question even though, on its face, it is not alternative. Such a question might be, "How would you go about something or other?" Within a short time this question will develop two or more methods of "going about" this "something" and from then on the discussion, and eventually the final decision, will concern themselves with a choice between these alternatives.

Discussion questions for use in training conferences come to the leader from two principal sources.



Either his group members prepare rough drafts of case problems based on their own experience, or the leader develops the question from his own experience or out of whole cloth. When group members are encouraged to contribute discussion questions, these should be handed to the leader in writing in advance of the meeting in which they are to be used. Then the leader has sufficient time to rewrite the question, if necessary, before presenting it to the group. Rarely will a question thus submitted not require some rewriting. If it is an alternative question it will almost certainly require balancing.

When you are preparing a set of discussion questions to be used in a particular meeting, no matter for what purpose it has been called, there are a number of things to bear in mind. You, of course, know the purpose of the meeting, and when you have clearly stated this aim in your conference plan, you have indicated the general trend that your discussion questions must follow.

The set of discussion questions for any conference must succeed one another in natural sequence. That is, question 2 should follow naturally after the discussion of question 1, and the remaining questions must be equally pat in sequence. In order to make this work out, it is necessary for the leader to acquire the ability to foresee, within reasonable limits, about what will be developed in the discussion of any question. It is impossible to do this accurately, especially if the leader never has heard the question discussed before, since a score of brains may de-

velop many ideas that the leader, in his solitary preview of the question, had missed entirely. Nevertheless, a good conference leader should be able to estimate about what will come out of a discussion question, what the situation will be at the close of the discussion of this question, and what sort of discussion question should follow it. To the extent that the leader can forecast such situations throughout a conference, his set of discussion questions will dovetail smoothly and naturally, or produce a series of jerky transitions which, of themselves, tend to slow up discussion and create loss of interest.

As an example of the preparation of complete sets of discussion questions for a conference, let us consider three series of questions that have been used in bona fide employee training conferences. The same principles involved in the construction of these questions will apply in the development of a series of questions for any other type of conference. The first of the training conferences in question was a special meeting of the foremen of a large manufacturing concern, called to devise ways and means of eliminating waste in manufacturing processes. As a direct result of this particular conference, a single change in the method of handling finished materials in the machine shops of this plant resulted in a yearly saving of \$35,000 in the remachining of apparatus which formerly had been roughly handled after machining.

In listing the discussion questions utilized in the conference plan prepared for this meeting, I will append to each question certain comments to in-

dicating about what may be reasonably expected to develop in the discussion of such a question as this.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### WASTE ELIMINATION

1. In your department, do you have more difficulty in preventing waste of material or waste of time? Why?

*Comment:* The purpose of this question is to start the individual foreman thinking about waste of time and waste of material in his department, and the relationship between the two. (It will be noted that there is motivation in the wording of the question: an assumption that the foreman is doing everything possible to prevent waste in his department. The appeal here is both to his sense of responsibility and to his craft pride. With any introductory question of this type the principal objective is to get the group to think along the lines in which you intend to direct the discussion.)

2. In preventing waste of material and time, is it better to depend on close supervision of the working force, checking carefully all operations for waste of time and material, or to train the working force along these lines and use less direct supervision? How does this work out in your department?

*Comment:* Now the discussion settles down to cases. In nearly every response to this question, the foremen will cite actual cases in their experience to back up their arguments. In a conference of this type, in which the leader is making no effort to achieve a particular decision from the group, he will make every effort to bring out as many ideas as possible, regardless of what the nature of these ideas may be. The wording of the

final sentence of the question is important, in that it encourages case discussion rather than theoretical analysis.

3. What are some of the common ways in which employees waste time in any department?

*Comment:* This question is designed to develop all the ways in which employees can waste time on the job. It offers an excellent opportunity for a blackboard development, when the leader lists the ways in which the foremen contend that employees waste time, and then causes the group to establish an order of importance for this list. From this discussion comes a consensus as to the practices of employees that are resulting in too much waste of time, and as to what forms of employee time wastage are of little importance.

4. If it were possible to do so, would you consider it advisable to reduce waste of time in your department to zero?

*Comment:* This question is introduced at this point in the conference in order to relieve a bit the pressure on the group. So far the members have been assuming that all waste of time was abhorrent. Now they can admit that they do not drive their men like machines, and can concede that a certain amount of wasted employee time may result in a higher degree of employee morale.

5. In one factory it was found that when special effort was made by the foremen to reduce waste of time, production fell off, owing to increased spoilage of material. What might have been some of the causes of this condition?

*Comment:* (This is the \$35,000 question previously referred to.) In this question the group is brought back

to a further analysis of wasted time and spoiled material. The question states a hypothetical case, which develops into the discussion of an alternative question. (Because this question hit at the crux of the difficulty in that particular plant, as far as spoilage of material was concerned, it created intense interest in this group. On the other hand, if this question had been the first to be discussed in the meeting, it probably would have created little interest, since the group would not have been ready for it.)

6. In another factory there are two foremen who have charge of punch press departments. These departments turn out similar products and have about the same number and grade of employees. Foreman *A* is a very busy man and usually can be found out in the shop supervising work. He has so much to do that he never gets a minute's rest all day.

Foreman *B* usually can be found at his desk and never appears very busy. He often talks for an hour or two with visitors and seems to be more interested in bowling and other employee activities than in production. Records indicate that these departments are about equal in production efficiency.

Is either of these foremen wasting time? Which one?

*Comment:* This question is listed in closing because it brings the problem of waste of time very close home to the foremen themselves. In any group of foremen or executives there are to be found representatives of each of the "schools" of supervision depicted by *A* and *B*. Each contingent will hear criticism of his methods of supervision. Such questions as these are very desirable for use in closing a conference, since it thus becomes

possible to dismiss the conference on a very high pitch of interest, perhaps at a moment when the group members would very much like to continue their discussion.

The two groups of discussion questions listed below were used in a safety training program, rehearsed-conference method, in which the groups were made up of the overhead line crews of a public utility corporation. In the first group of questions, the discussion centers around one underlying cause of accidents, Speed. In the second group of questions, the subject for discussion was Negligence, as an underlying cause of accidents. The comments appended to each question are those that appeared on the conference plan issued to the foremen who led these meetings.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### *Safety Training Program*

#### *Conference Subject: SPEED*

1. Have you ever had an accident or come near having an accident because you were working too fast? If you have, tell us about it.

*Comment:* This question is intended to start the group thinking of the subject of this conference, Speed, and to draw out a number of responses based on experience. The leader should be sure that the response actually deals with Speed, and not some other underlying cause. Little discussion is expected. Allow about 10 minutes for these responses.

2. What are the causes of too much speed on the part of the workman?

*Comment:* When you get the first response to this question, print on the blackboard the heading, "Causes of Dangerous Speed." (Don't put this heading on the board before the meeting.) Number responses as you get them. Try to get from five to ten good causes listed. Don't place them in order of importance. The causes developed in the rehearsal meeting were:

*Causes of Dangerous Speed*

- a. Hurrying to avoid quitting late.
- b. Hurrying to meet a schedule.
- c. Hurrying to prevent taking out equipment again.
- d. Emergencies.
- e. Competition between workmen.
- f. Desire to please supervisor.
- g. Driving of supervisor.
- h. Temperament.

Allow about 15 minutes for this development.

3. What steps should be taken to prevent accidents from the above listed causes?

*Comment:* In this discussion take up each of the items listed on the board, one at a time, and ask the group to suggest methods of preventing accidents in each case. This should be the most important and beneficial discussion in the entire meeting. Allow about 1 hour for this discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Safety Training Program*

*Conference Subject: NEGLIGENCE*

1. What are some of the things a workman might do that you would consider negligent?

*Comment:* The principal purpose of this first question is to start the men thinking about the subject of Negli-

gence. A number of responses should come out in a few minutes. Don't put any of them on the blackboard. Allow about 10 minutes for the discussion of this question.

2. What is the difference between negligence and criminal negligence?

*Comment:* The idea to be brought out here is the fact that negligence may become criminal when the safety of fellow workmen is involved. Allow about 5 minutes for this discussion.

3. Under what circumstances is the supervisor responsible in case a subordinate is negligent? When is the supervisor not responsible?

*Comment:* The first part of this question gives the group an opportunity to put some of the blame for negligence on the supervisor. The last part of the question makes the group take their share of the blame for negligence. Allow 30 minutes for this discussion.

4. It is known that an employee neglects to use proper safeguards while working, but no accident happens. In another case, the employee neglects to use proper safeguards and causes a costly accident to equipment. Should there be any difference in the action of management in handling these two cases?

*Comment:* The idea to be brought out in this discussion is that an employee should be punished for failure to use safeguards, whether an accident happens or not. Allow 15 minutes for this discussion.

5. If an employee is habitually negligent of the safety of himself and others, what is the best way to cure him of this?



*Comment:* This discussion should be the most valuable in carry-over of all the five questions listed in this plan. The idea of the employee's responsibility for training himself in safe habits of work should be developed; also his responsibility to help a fellow workman overcome dangerous habits of neglect should come out. Allow about 25 minutes for this question.

A study of the discussion questions listed above and their appended comments should assist you in preparing discussion questions for the particular type of conference you expect to lead. Although the foregoing questions were used in employee training conferences, they may safely be used as general models for the construction of questions to be discussed in business conferences or in committee meetings. See to it that your questions, like these samples, are pithy and punchy, employing no unnecessary verbiage to put over their ideas. State concrete cases when possible. Be reasonably sure that your questions, as written, will arouse interest and a difference of opinion in the group for which they have been designed. Above all, be quite sure that the question, as stated, gives no faintest inkling of a *desired* response.

Put a number of good, thought-provoking questions such as these into a conference plan, lead the conference as it should be led, and you may rest assured that every conference you conduct will be successful. When you lead meetings of this sort, not only do you accomplish much more than you otherwise would, but the group members thoroughly enjoy their participation in the discussion.

## CHAPTER V

### GROUP MOTIVATION

If, on successive days, you were to sit in as a visitor at two conferences in which, although they were dealing with the same subject, neither the group personnel nor the leaders were the same, you might well see two entirely different conference situations. In the one case, leader and group obviously would be working in harmony, and the group members, although perhaps arguing heatedly with one another, nevertheless would give you the impression that they were working together, pooling their brain power in an attempt to solve a difficult problem.

In the second conference, both the leader and the group may, in intelligence and knowledge of the subject under discussion, be the equals of the leader and the group in the first conference. The discussion questions used in the second conference are the same as those used in the one first observed. The same general plan is being followed in both meetings. But in this second meeting there is apparent a lack of interest in the proceedings; an absence of liking and respect for the leader may be evidenced by the group, and it soon becomes quite obvious that nothing worth while is being accomplished.

Where the foregoing situations exist it is almost certain that the leader of the first conference has

properly applied the correct motivation to his group members, while the second leader has failed to do this. In other words, the first leader has made an appeal to some desire or wish that exists in the minds or hearts of his group members, and thereby has won their cooperation. The second leader has followed his written plan, but has neglected to motivate his group.

A great deal has been said and written about this subject of motivation as it applies to classroom teaching. It may be that it is more difficult to motivate children than to motivate adults and, except in religious educational work, conferences usually are held with adults. In any case, it is a rather simple matter to motivate a group of adults so that they will enter into a conference with the proper spirit. It is necessary only to understand a few of the more common desires of those who attend conferences, and know how to make a simple, practical appeal to these desires. This is difficult only for the individual who is out of sympathy with his fellow men, and that person is entirely out of place as a leader of conferences.

It is a simple matter to understand what are the motives to which a conference leader may appeal in order to get full cooperation from his group. It is a little harder to learn just how to apply this motivation without making the application too obvious to the group. First, let us check over a list of the most common motives to which a conference leader may appeal. Afterward we will see how an appeal may be made to each of these motives.

## DESIRES OF GROUP TO WHICH LEADER MAY APPEAL

1. Ambition (desire for promotion and increase of pay).
2. Job pride.
3. Desire for praise.
4. Loyalty.
5. Desire to show off.
6. Intercompany rivalry.
7. Interdepartmental rivalry.
8. Personal rivalry.
9. Publicity for skill.
10. Altruism toward new employees.
11. Making work easier.
12. Making work more interesting.
13. Self-respect.
14. Pride in company.
15. Sense of responsibility.
16. Fear of losing one's job.
17. Fear of censure.
18. Curiosity.
19. Friendship for conference leader.
20. Confidence in conference leader.

The motives in this list include those to which an appeal may be made in any conference. Those which refer to an employee's relationship with the organization employing him will find particular application in business conferences and in employee training conferences. The more general motives listed, such as rivalry, fear, and desire for praise, may be applied in any type of conference group.

The titles given to the various motives are self-

explanatory, but explanation should be made here regarding the connection between the various motives listed and the degree of interest existing in a given conference. At the same time that we do this, for every motive listed we shall also consider how the leader may best apply each motivation, indirectly, in the course of a conference.

*Ambition* is a powerful motive to which the conference leader of almost any group may appeal. It refers to the natural desire of nearly everyone for more power and prestige and for the increase in monetary rewards that goes with these emoluments. In every business conference in which the leader is the group's superior, there is likely to be in evidence ambition as motivation. Although no mention ever is made of the fact, it is pretty well understood that the subordinate who most often in conference brings forward the best suggestions and ideas for improvement of the business, and who generally conducts himself in a way to win the approval of the superior leading these conferences, will receive especial consideration when promotion and increase of pay are in order. Likewise, in the training conference there exists the tacit understanding that the employee is learning things which, if applied to his job, will make him worth more to his company.

In the use of ambition as motivation we have a good example of the right and the wrong way to apply any type of motivation. Usually it is unwise to motivate a group by crude, obvious methods. The indirect appeal, wherever it can be made, is much better all round. Thus, in an employee train-

ing group it is permissible for the leader, in his opening remarks at any conference, to announce that monthly grades are being made for each group member on the basis of his intelligent participation in discussion, and that these grades are to be sent to the head of the division in which the student is employed. This may be the only motivation that the majority of the members of that group will ever require, since they will understand without further explanation that their showing in these meetings will have a bearing on their future promotions and wage increases.

Too direct motivation, of the club variety, is much more likely to create antagonism than to inspire a group to better performance. Threats of discharge, of demotion, of loss of salary for failure of a group member to cooperate with a conference leader who is that member's superior, are entirely out of order.

As with ambition, so with every other motive to which you may appeal in getting results with a conference group. There are, in each case, an indirect, subtle appeal, and a crude, obvious, and ire-provoking appeal. It is the leader's responsibility to work out both the proper motivation to apply to a particular group, and the proper method of getting it over indirectly in any particular instance. If you will glance over the foregoing list of motives before planning a conference with a given group, you will almost certainly find one or more motives to which a strong, indirect appeal may be made.

*Job pride* may be indirectly appealed to in any

conference in which the group is permitted to discuss its daily work. Whenever a group member is given an opportunity to tell others of new and improved methods that he has worked out on his job, this motivation has been given sufficiently strong application. If the leader then compliments the group member for the initiative or skill thus displayed, the motivation is given definite point. It must be borne in mind, too, that motivation such as that just mentioned affects not only the member to whom it is applied, but every other member of the group. In this case, you will find that other group members will follow the first one, telling of new methods that *they* have worked out, and the gentle application of job pride as motivation for one employee will have its effect on the entire group.

Giving credit for responses is one form of motivation. Particularly at the opening of a conference, when the leader indicates appreciation of the fact that one member has made a response, this inevitably encourages others to talk. At the same time, it encourages the member who first responded to reenter the discussion. This and other forms of commendation of group members by the conference leader satisfy their *desire for praise*.

*Loyalty* can be appealed to in employee conferences only when it exists. In some companies the employees are intensely loyal; in others, they have no sense of loyalty whatever. When it is there, a sense of loyalty can best be appealed to, not by conducting "hooraw" pep meetings, but by quoting, in conference, statements made by an opposing faction

outside the company, which may be dramatized as the "enemy." A little of this will have more effect on a sincerely loyal group of employees than would any number of pep meetings. Loyalty is not a temporary emotional condition. It is based, rather, on the employee's years of association with a company's intelligent personnel policy, and is little affected by oratory.

*Desire to show off* is a motive to which appeal may be made in any type of group. It differs from job pride in that it may concern itself with any activity in which the group member is interested, other than his daily work. Properly employed, this motivation may cause a very reserved group member to talk freely. The method of making the appeal should, in this case, be perfectly obvious. All that is necessary is to give the group member an opportunity to impress his fellows by any means of which he is capable—in other words, to encourage him to show off.

The three *rivalry* motives listed—*intercompany*, *interdepartmental*, and *personal*—may be used in any conference, but the second named should be used sparingly, since, in years gone by, it has been worked to death by supervisors who attempted to persuade one department of a company to excel the output of another department. However, any publicity given by the conference leader to superior achievement on the part of a rival company or department, or, conversely, to excellent achievement by individual employees in his conference group,



when it is not overdone, is good motivation for the entire group.

*Publicity for skill* is more often applied directly as motivation in training conferences, particularly when employees are being trained in supervision, safety, sales technique, or public contacting practice. In such training conferences it is possible to motivate the entire group strongly by encouraging individuals to discuss methods they have personally developed which are superior to those in common usage among their fellow workmen. Such methods might apply to handling subordinates, to the development of safe working practices or selling technique, or to the discovery of new routines in public contacting.

*Altruism toward new employees* is most commonly employed as motivation when employee training groups are made up jointly of employees of long service and those of shorter service. In such a conference the old-timers frequently can be persuaded to participate when the leader indicates that their opinions will be helpful to those present who have less experience. Such an instance might occur in supervisory training during a period of plant expansion, when foremanship conference groups were made up of both experienced and inexperienced supervisors.

*Making work easier* and *making work more interesting* are selfish motives that are appealed to whenever a group is discussing its own work. The appeal to the first of these may be made directly, since everyone is interested in finding easier ways to

perform his daily tasks. It is only necessary to tell the group members that they are there to work out easier ways of doing their work. In the second case, it is advisable actually to make the job more interesting to the worker through the discussions held in training conferences, then let the idea develop from individual group members that these conferences do serve to make their work more interesting.

*Self-respect* as motivation should require no discussion here, other than to emphasize the danger of making a direct appeal to this motive in any group at any time. Such action on the part of the leader could only create antagonism. Nevertheless, indirect motivation can be made in which the appeal is ostensibly to the competitive instinct of the group member. This works very well in groups of the supervisory or salesman type, in which the members are perhaps more generally aggressive and self-confident than members of other groups are likely to be. In such cases as these, the individual's self-respect is intact only so long as he considers his performance equal to, or better than, that of his fellow workers.

*Pride in company* is distinguished from loyalty in that this attribute of the employee is based on accomplishments of the concern for which he works, accomplishments for which he can take some share of credit, however small. This has nothing to do with the loyalty that a worker may feel toward his company, a loyalty that exists whether or not the organization is successful or achieving great things.

As motivation in conference, pride in company is best appealed to indirectly by developing references from the group to outstanding achievements of the organization as a whole. The inference is that greater things can be done by the company only if employee performance reaches a yet higher level.

*Sense of responsibility* is the motive to which the experienced conference leader makes his strongest appeal when dealing with groups of supervisors and executives. Everything in the lives of these people revolves around their sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, for production, and toward the company employing them. In supervisory training conferences much of the discussion is confined to the supervisor's discharge of his many and varied responsibilities. Almost every discussion question employed in such conferences has for its subject one of the general or specific responsibilities of the supervisor, and the problem is to find the best method of meeting this responsibility.

*Fear of losing one's job*, as motivation, should require little discussion here, since everyone who ever has been gainfully employed probably has felt this fear at one time or other. As motivation for a conference group it must, of course, be used sparingly and only as a last resort. Even then it would be entirely out of order for a conference leader who is a superior in organization rank to tell a group member that he will be discharged from his job if he does not participate intelligently in conference discussion. If this fear is ever appealed to, it should be indirectly, in the same manner as it appears in

any fair and justifiable reprimand administered by a good supervisor. In this case, no threat ever is made by the supervisor during the reprimand, yet the employee knows that his boss has the power to discharge him from his job, and this knowledge colors the entire interview.

*Fear of censure* operates as motivation similarly to the fear of losing one's job, and the same cautions must be observed in appealing to it during a conference. In general, the more thick-skinned the group member is, the less he will fear censure, and the more he needs it. Therefore, even though the leader of a discussion group be the superior of the group member, he usually can find much better motives on which to base his appeal than fear in any form.

*Curiosity*, as a motive for group interest, is usually applicable only in an opening conference of a series. Then the group may wonder "what the meetings are all about," and this curiosity may be sufficiently strong to operate as an interest factor at the beginning. Once any mystery concerning the purpose of these meetings has been removed, however, dependence can be placed on curiosity as motivation only when the leader finds it advisable to appeal to it in making certain assignments in such a way as to arouse the curiosity of the group regarding the execution of these assignments.<sup>1</sup>

*Friendship for the conference leader*, in my opin-

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VII in "Employee Training," written by the author and published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1942.

ion, may become one of the most powerful motives to which any leader may appeal. Only in the case of the conference leader who cannot win the friendship of a group with which he is regularly leading discussion would this motive be worthless, and a person of whom this is true would be entirely out of his element as a conference leader. There is nothing in the relationship of discussion leader and group to preclude the existence of the warmest feeling of friendship between them.

Many years ago, when I was rather new at conference work, I was given a demonstration of group friendship I have never forgotten. At that time I was conducting a series of supervisory training conferences in a Chicago public evening school. The group was made up of local factory foremen. We had been meeting together for perhaps a dozen nights, three nights weekly, and although our entire association was limited to these conference periods, there had developed an exceptionally friendly relationship among the group members, and between the leader and the group.

About this time it happened that two expert critics of conference instruction asked to visit one of my conferences at this school, the idea being that if they evaluated my work as satisfactory I would be offered a rather good job in this line of work—a job that many other industrial training men were seeking.

After observing my conference, the critics wrote their reports to their employer. Some weeks later (after I had been given the job in question), I was

shown these critical comments. Each of the observers had emphasized in his report that the group appeared to be highly motivated throughout the conference, although there was little evidence of effort on the part of the leader to motivate the group. It was this effortless motivation that impressed the critics and caused them to recommend me for the position.

Now what had actually happened was this: In the meeting previous to that attended by the critics, I put my cards on the table with my group, explaining to them that observers would be present at the following meeting, and that their report on what they saw there was important to me. I asked the group to pay no attention to the visitors, but to enter into the discussion with everything they had. It is little wonder, then, that the critics reported a lack of apparent application of motivation in the meeting they observed. The motivation had been applied in the previous conference. And it was nothing on earth but friendship for the conference leader which caused that night-school group to put on such a conference that the critics went away more than pleased with what they had observed.

*Confidence in the conference leader* is a motivation that becomes increasingly strong as the relationship between an adequate discussion leader and a particular conference group continues. It is based on the group's contact with its leader, from which has developed the feeling that any discussion question put before that group by that leader will be well worth discussing. This motivation can be-

come so important that it may, in some cases, be said that no other motivation has much effect if confidence in the leader does not exist in the group.

This feeling of confidence enters into all the relationships of group and leader, as well as into the selection of discussion questions. Here the situation is similar to that between any supervisor and his subordinates. The group members, like these subordinates, develop confidence in their leader when he has proved that he is fair-minded, intelligent, and honest in all his dealings with them.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that motivation should be applied indirectly, whenever this is possible, and never applied too heavily or too obviously. A group that becomes aware that it is being motivated may respond for a while, but eventually it will get tired of repeated injections of stimulation and rebel against any and all motivation.

In this same connection, many embryo conference leaders make another serious mistake—an attempt to motivate a group insincerely. Motivation, if it is to be entirely effective, must be *sincere*. A single false note in the leader's appeal to his group may become at once evident to everyone present at the conference. Once a group gets the feeling that it is being preached to—especially by someone who does not believe his own preachments—the leader may look out for trouble.

This lack of sincerity sometimes takes yet another form, especially when the conference leader is some-

what immature. The young college graduate, for example, who has entered industrial personnel work, may be called upon to lead training conferences with older workmen or supervisors of his plant. Because of his inexperience and uncertainty, this young man sometimes feels called upon to make an effort to impress the workmen or foremen with his superior erudition and scholastic background. This, of course, is stupid and inexcusable, and can result only in a quiet form of rebellion on the part of the group that will ruin any conference ever convened. The young conference leader has sufficient handicaps to overcome without going out of his way in this manner to create others. The remedy should be obvious.

The finest motivation such a young man can apply to a group of older men is that of appealing to their superior knowledge and experience to help him. But this appeal must be absolutely sincere or the group will see through its sham and proceed to make things exceedingly difficult for the youngster who thus demonstrates that he has underestimated their intelligence.

The foregoing discussion of motivation may assist the conference leader in making a successful appeal to those desires which exist in some degree in everyone. If the leader will give a little consideration to his relationships with fellow human beings in general, he will discover that in the most pleasant of these contacts he has been applying, perhaps unconsciously, definite motivation to others. For any group or type of individual, there are certain motives to which each ordinarily will respond. The



leader's previous contact with a particular group, or with people in similar occupations, will aid him in selecting the right motives, to which his appeal will be most strongly directed.

Ordinarily it will be necessary to appeal to but one or two motives in a single conference. When a group is responding properly, refrain from attempting further motivation at that time. It is quite possible to overmotivate a group to the point where its members become irritable and hypersensitive. In such an instance, their resentment is most likely to make itself felt against the conference leader.

A final caution regarding the indiscriminate use of motivation may be in order. It sometimes happens that a student of this subject may learn the rudiments of motivation and forthwith spend most of his time applying his newly found technique in all his contacts with his fellow men. Such misuse of motivation, insincere as it certainly must be, can result only in the eventual creation of resentment in the breast of the recipients of these too-obvious injections of stimulation.

## CHAPTER VI

### EVALUATING THE CONFERENCE

It may come as a surprise to many who have been leading conferences of one kind or another for years that the value of any conference in terms of ultimate results may be accurately measured while the meeting is in progress. Such evaluation is not difficult to make, provided only that the attempt to do so is not made by the conference leader himself. Any proper measurement of the efficacy of a discussion meeting must be made by a trained observer who attends the conference as a critical, but silent, visitor.

The reason for the conference leader's inability to judge his own meeting should be evident. Briefly, he is altogether too busy conducting the conference to find time to analyze the exact degree of success he is achieving in conducting that conference. Such evaluation must be made by someone who has no other duty at the moment, and who also is entirely qualified by training to act as a conference critic. It frequently happens, too, that a good conference leader may possess little critical sense, and would fail utterly as a conference critic. The services of conference critics are frequently employed in connection with the administration of the rehearsed-conference method of employee training in indus-

trial and commercial organizations (see Chap. IX).

Conference evaluation is based on an analysis of those components that are found in the make-up of any conference. These components have been determined to be (1) the attitude of the group toward the leader; (2) the technique of the leader in conducting the conference; (3) the interest displayed by the group in the discussion; (4) the degree to which the group participates intelligently in the discussion.

With the above-named components in mind, it is possible to construct a rating scale by which any conference may be evaluated. This rating scale covers the elements of the conference, and, in addition, the factors that go to make up these elements. Such a scale is given on page 91.


In making use of this rating scale it is necessary for the critic to attend the conference as a silent observer, preferably seated apart from the group in the rear of the conference room. As the conference proceeds the observer takes notes, and at the close of the meeting makes a rating on the conference rating scale.

The observer's notes must give him the picture of the conference at various stages of its progress. A trained critic can study the leader and the group and judge the success of the conference. In his observation of the meeting he automatically weighs the value of the conference in terms of the seven elements of the rating scale. To do this, the critic must learn to watch for and evaluate the indications

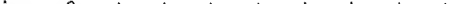
### CONFERENCE RATING SHEET

## THE CONFERENCE LEADER

Liking: 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
What degree of kindness, open-mindedness,  
and real sense of humor did leader show?

Respect: 0  100  
Did leader at all times show complete mastery  
of situation?

Quality of Statement: 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
To what degree were leader's statements concise, pertinent, and vivid?

Presentation: 0  100  
Was presentation such that group was constantly aware of real problem to be solved?  
Questions? Credit given?

## THE GROUP

Interest: 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
How much did the interest wander? How  
much distraction necessary to divert interest?

Amount of Participation: 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
How much did the group talk voluntarily?  
How evenly distributed was participation?

Quality of Participation: 0 \_\_\_\_\_ 100  
How much thought was indicated by group in responses? What tendency to agree with others?

Average Rating:..... Observed by:.....

of good or poor conference leadership under each of these classifications.

*Liking:* If a conference is to be completely successful, the group must have a friendly feeling toward the leader. The group will like the leader if he is entirely fair and impartial in his treatment of them, playing no favorites with individuals. They will like him if his own attitude is friendly, but not apologetic. They will like him if he refrains from adopting an air of superiority, and if he maintains an unruffled demeanor even under difficult circumstances. They will like a leader who displays a genuine sense of humor.

Conversely, a group will dislike a leader whose attitude is officious or superior, who displays partiality to individuals, and who is obviously close-minded to the ideas of others. A leader who is given to facetiousness rather than to humor will antagonize many of his group members, as will one who enjoys poking fun at certain members of his group.

With these facts in mind, it is not difficult for the trained observer to tell by the leader's words and actions whether or not he is winning the liking of his group. The only difficulty here is to determine the exact degree of liking the leader has *earned*. Making so exact a rating is simply a matter of practice, obtained while the critic was observing many conferences. It should be borne in mind that all ratings of the conference leader, as in the case of this one on liking, reflect the efforts of the leader rather than the actual reaction of the group. In certain instances, a leader may do everything

humanly possible to win the liking of his group, yet because of conditions beyond his control, and perhaps because of circumstances antedating the conference itself, there will appear evidences of hostility on the part of certain group members. In such a case, the leader must be rated on his efforts to win the group's liking rather than on the group's reaction to these efforts.

*Respect:* A group respects its leader for certain reasons, and likes its leader for other and different reasons. It may, indeed, like him very much and respect him but little. However, when a group has slight respect for its leader, the likelihood is that the conference will be of little value to anyone concerned. The reason for this is that the leader's control of the conference situation depends on the degree to which he can inspire respect in his group, and without this control the leader cannot keep the discussion from wandering, or prevent hogging of the discussion by individual group members, or eliminate those unfortunate private conversations that spoil so many conferences.

When you are evaluating a leader's work in conference and wish to obtain a rating on his ability to inspire respect, watch for these indications: Does the leader prevent the discussion from wandering, on such occasions always bringing the group quickly back to the subject under discussion? Does the leader at once stop all private conversations between group members? Can he handle obstreperous or antagonistic group members firmly? Is he resourceful in meeting unforeseen situations smoothly? In

a word, to what degree does he at all times have complete command of the conference situation?

Some conference leaders can win the liking of a group, but not its respect. Other leaders create antagonism in a group, at the same time maintaining perfect order. A good conference leader must attain, in group reaction, a nice balance between liking and respect. This is an objective not always easy of accomplishment, and there will arise occasions on which the leader must choose between "making a play" for a group's liking, and insisting on maintaining his control of the conference situation. At such a time it may become necessary to sacrifice, to some extent, perfect attainment in one condition for excellence in the other.

Whenever this situation exists, the leader should not hesitate to put his major emphasis on retaining the complete respect of the group. Even though it becomes necessary to offend certain too-talkative or too-facetious group members by reprimanding them in the presence of other group members, this should, nevertheless, be done whenever the occasion warrants such procedure. A weak, hesitant, conciliatory conference leader who seeks the approbation of his group members at the expense of their respect, usually winds up with neither their liking nor their respect. The leader who has the complete respect of his group members can, by unbending a bit, frequently secure their liking. But the man or woman who fails to inspire respect never can succeed as a conference leader. From this it should be evident that respect outweighs liking as an element

in the rating of a conference leader. Since it is true that certain elements of the conference rating scale are more important than others, an estimate will later be given of the respective weights of each of the seven elements of the conference rating scale.

*Quality of Statement:* In rating this element the critic is interested in noting the clarity and conciseness of the leader's statements to the group. Is the leader getting over his ideas in the fewest possible number of words, and is this particularly true in regard to his introductory remarks? Can he convey an idea, especially in delivering follow-up questions, without finding it necessary to "stop the conference" while he laboriously inserts such a question into the discussion?

Quality of statement is important in conference work, principally because of the necessity for the leader to say a lot in the fewest possible words—a faculty which many public speakers might develop with profit. A wordy orator may, nevertheless, eventually accomplish something worth while; but a wordy conference leader makes it difficult for any group to work out a solution to a problem. The proper epitaph for many a would-be conference leader might have been: He talked too much.

*Presentation:* Here, without question, is the most important element on the conference rating scale. Much of the critic's attention will be concentrated on the leader's method of presentation of his subject matter for the conference. The observer must ask himself these questions: Was the conference carefully planned? Was the group properly motivated?



Was there available a sufficiency of genuinely thought-provoking discussion questions? Was the leader's transition from question to question smooth and uninterrupted? Were the leader's follow-up questions well chosen, calculated to promote further intelligent discussion? Were these follow-up questions inserted into the discussion at the proper instant, and in such a manner as not to slow up the discussion? How did the leader handle emergency situations that could not have been foreseen and for which no preparation could have been made in advance?

From the foregoing it will be readily understood that in this rating to a large extent lies the answer to whether or not the conference under consideration will be successful. If the leader acquits himself well in all the above particulars, the group almost certainly will respond, and an interesting, resultful discussion will ensue. Almost everything that goes into the make-up of a successful conference, with the exception of the personality of the leader, is covered in these questions. Only in unusual situations will it happen that a conference will be rated highly in presentation and at the same time receive low grades in group interest and participation.

It is in presentation that the leader has an opportunity to show his skill. He must build his conference carefully and scientifically, question by question, and idea by idea. Then, too, on occasion he can go beyond the science of conference leadership, as represented by careful planning and execution, and display any artistry he may possess in this field.

There is no question but that, in following the same plan and using the same questions, one conference leader can put something extra into his leadership that another excellent leader cannot attain, and the difference is not explainable on the ground of evident superiority in personality. One leader simply possesses artistic ability, and this enables him to sense nuances in conference situations that entirely escape the notice of his equally hard-working, but less sensitive, contemporary. Curiously enough, one evidence of the leader's possession of such artistry may be displayed when suddenly he departs entirely from his prepared plan and extemporizes for a time during the conference. From this, however, it must not be assumed that every departure from plan on the part of the leader indicates evidence of artistry. It may indicate only that the leader's wits are wool-gathering.

*Interest:* In evaluating a group's interest in the subject under discussion, the critic must watch for certain indications that always appear when a group is either interested or uninterested. An interested group is not particularly aware of the passage of time. Its members tend to sit quietly, except when laboring under excitement engendered by the discussion itself. The members pay slight attention to extraneous noises or interruptions, and these have little power to distract their attention from the discussion.

On the other hand, any group members who are uninterested will register boredom. It is easy to see that they would rather be almost any place than

in attendance at that conference. If there is a clock in the room they consult it frequently; otherwise, they will more or less ostentatiously check the time with their watches. A thoroughly bored group, forced to sit through a dull 2-hour conference, really suffers.

If an actual measurement of interest is to be made, in order that a grade on the rating scale may be arrived at, it is necessary that the interest be evaluated, say, at 5-minute intervals throughout the conference. It is quite possible for an experienced critic in this way to construct an interest graph for a conference, depicting the ebb and flow of interest as the discussion proceeds from topic to topic. Such a graph has value when a study is being made of the effect of certain types of discussion question on different groups. A study embracing the preparation of interest graphs might well be made in developing a standard set of discussion questions for use in diverse employee training groups.

In many years spent in conducting conferences, I remember with some gratification two instances in which the interest of my group in the discussion was proved beyond question. These cases particularly interest me because they emphasize so strongly the fact that a more absorbing degree of interest can be developed in a conference group than can be developed in the audience of the most gifted speaker who ever lived. In the first instance, I was conducting an evening training conference with a group of business executives. For some unknown reason the

electric lights in the conference room were suddenly extinguished, and the room was plunged into total darkness. For more than 10 minutes no group member could see the face of another, nor of the leader, yet the discussion went ahead without any hitch whatever, and with no indication of diminution of interest in the question before the group. The fact that the executives making up this group were those in charge of a large public utility corporation, and had no way of knowing whether the blackout was caused by a blown fuse or by a serious shutdown of the entire power system for whose continuity of service they were responsible, made the instance more noteworthy.

The other case of unquestioned absorption in a discussion occurred in Los Angeles with a similar executive group, on the evening of March 10, 1933. Ten minutes after I opened this conference the great earthquake of that year shook and tore at our downtown office building, apparently bent on its immediate destruction. During the early temblors the discussion continued, one member of the group pounding on the table with his right hand to emphasize a point he was making, while with his left he supported a heavy bookcase that swayed precariously behind him. When the earthquake reached the peak of intensity it was, of course, impossible to continue the discussion. Yet, as soon as the successive waves began to subside in force, and it was possible to remain seated at the table, the group members indicated their readiness to resume the conference. The discussion undoubtedly would have

been continued except that the discussion leader had had more than enough for one night, and adjourned the conference forthwith.

There never existed a public speaker (nor, for that matter, a conference leader) who could hold the interest of his audience through such an earthquake as that one. But this group was interested in the discussion in which its members were participating, and wished to finish the discussion, regardless of seismological disturbances.

*Amount of Participation:* In making a rating on this element of the conference, the critic simply estimates the amount of talking that is done by the group, and the degree to which this response is spread evenly among the group members. A high rating would indicate that everybody present was participating in the discussion, and that nearly everyone was talking as often as an opportunity was afforded. In such a situation the group members almost invariably interrupt one another, at least occasionally. This tendency to interrupt is a desirable condition of affairs in any conference.

The amount of participation by the group is important as an element in conference rating because this element is affected strongly by the degree of interest existing in that conference, and because the amount of response, to a considerable extent, depends on the presentation of the material by the leader. It must be borne in mind, however, that in rating amount of participation, the critic is not interested in the quality of the response of the group. As long as the group members do plenty of talking,

whether or not they say anything worth while, the amount of participation must rate high.

An important factor in determining the amount of participation possible for any group is the amount of talking done by the conference leader. If his contributions, in statements and questions, amount to more than 25 per cent of all the talking done in the meeting, the group certainly is not afforded the opportunity to talk as much as it should. A better participation factor for the leader would be 20 per cent of the total talking, or even less than that amount.

*Quality of Participation:* In making this rating, the critic evaluates not the amount of talking done in the conference, but the degree to which the response of the group shows real thought. As a rule, this rating is a comparative one, the critic having perhaps heard the same discussion in other groups, and being therefore in a position to know what should develop in the discussion of a given question. If the response throughout the conference indicates superficial thinking, the rating will be low. If the group really digs into the question and develops many new ideas, the rating will be high.

Quality of response in conference discussion is not nearly so much a matter of group types as some of us would like to believe. Until a leader has made every effort to get thoughtful response from a group, regardless of the background of the group members, he must not assume that certain types of individuals whose work requires little mental effort cannot think clearly on any subject that is within their experi-

ence. The conference leader who lets the members of his group see that he expects intelligent response from them will get good quality of participation from that group. As a rule, when an industrial conference leader fails to get thoughtful response from a group of workmen in—let us say—a safety meeting, it is because the leader is foolishly attempting to patronize the group members by assuming them to be his mental inferiors. Actually, when a conference is properly conducted with groups of this type, it has been my experience that many of those who love to treat workingmen condescendingly would be hard put to it to keep up with the discussion such men can develop.

In rating quality of participation, the critic must be careful to consider only the amount of thought indicated by the group's response. Sometimes quantity of response is easily mistaken for quality of response, and the interest displayed by the group in the question under discussion may be confused with the degree of thought exemplified in the members' expressions of opinion. It is true, of course, that keen interest usually develops quantity response, and it is also quite frequently true that these two factors, acting together, will result in excellent quality of response. But, until observation has proved this to be the case, it must not be assumed to be so.

A few suggestions for the further guidance of conference critics may not be amiss here. In the first place, it appears that the conventional academic teaching critic has difficulty in getting results as a

conference critic. The teaching critic has been trained to evaluate academic methods of instruction, carried on principally by lecture method, and frequently fails to note the less obvious and intangible values present in a group discussion. It is easier to check the efforts of a teacher than it is to watch the reactions of an entire group. The conference critic must do both of these things, and group reaction is far more important in conference criticism than in classroom observation.

Conference critics, like all analysts, must guard against becoming hypercritical. When one sets out to develop his critical faculties to the nth degree, it frequently happens that he becomes a picayunish faultfinder rather than a constructive critic. Such a person enters the conference room determined to find in the technique of the leader as many weaknesses and as few indications of good leadership as possible. In this state of mind, the critic too often magnifies unimportant details, and at the same time entirely misses splendid instances of inspirational conference leadership.

Similarly, in employee training conferences, where critics are most frequently used, the critic probably has a copy of the conference plan that the leader is following. Too often the critic will confuse the necessity for following the spirit of this plan with the necessity for following the letter of it. In such a case, the critic rates the conference, not on the basis of results accomplished (which is the only important criterion of any conference), but rather in terms of the degree to which the leader adhered



to his conference plan. Departure from a previously prepared lesson plan is a serious offense for the academic classroom teacher under any circumstances. In conference instruction it may, at times, be an indication of commendable resourcefulness on the part of the leader, and when this is true it should be rated as such.

In preparing a written critical report of a conference, to be submitted to the conference leader himself, the critic must exercise care. It is important that the report open with commendation of some sort. After that it is permissible to criticize the weak points of the conference, using always the third person in all references to the leader. Finally, finish off on a hopeful note regarding future improvement and, if it is possible to do so truthfully, compliment the leader on any improvement noted in his work in recent conferences.

Never offer a conference leader oral criticism immediately at the close of a meeting. At that time he is in no mood to accept criticism. Any oral comment made then should be general and, for the most part, commendatory. On the day following, when the leader receives the written report, he is in a much better frame of mind to accept critical comment on the conference in question.

As to the possibilities for accurate evaluation of a conference on the rating scale discussed in this chapter, it need only be stated that two or more critics, trained in the use of this scale, will rate any conference jointly observed by them with a spread of not more than one point on their average rating for

the conference. It follows, then, that ratings made by this method may be trusted to depict faithfully the conditions existing within any conference. This is of particular importance to the educational director who is responsible for the success of a rehearsed-conference training program, yet who must depend on conference critics to evaluate the work of individual conference leaders in the training program.

Earlier in this chapter I suggested that the various elements on which any conference is rated should be given different weights if a true picture of their effect on the success of the conference is to be obtained. This weighting of elements may be important when the work of a conference leader is close to the border line of failure. If the person in question happens to possess any strong points as a discussion leader, these will show in the ratings. If his strength should lie in those elements to which we attach the greatest weight, his salvage potentiality may be much greater than it would be if his work showed weakness in those elements.

Any effort to weight accurately the elements of a conference must of necessity result in figures that are open to contradiction. Therefore, in offering the following weights, I wish to emphasize that these represent only my own opinion, influenced somewhat by the suggestions of other conference leaders with whom I have discussed this matter. I consider that, on a basis of the seven elements equaling 100 points, the individual elements should be weighted as follows: Liking 10, Respect 15, Quality

of Statement 5, Presentation 25, Interest 20, Amount of Participation 10, and Quality of Participation 15. Whether or not these weights are accurate, it is probably true that Presentation and Interest are the most important elements to be considered in rating any conference, and that the remaining elements should follow in about the order given.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BUSINESS CONFERENCE

The most extensive application of the conference has occurred in business and professional organizations. Perhaps because of the very number of conferences taking place every day, too many business meetings are poorly conducted. Probably not more than one conference of this kind in a hundred gets the results it should. Since everything that happens in any conference is the responsibility of the leader of that meeting, we must attach the blame for most poor business conferences to ineffectual planning and execution on the part of the leader.

Frequently the leader of a business conference is superior in rank to the group members, and much poor conference leadership may stem from this fact. When group members are subordinates, it simplifies matters and obviates any possibility of loss of control of the situation if the leader simply tells the group what he intends to do about the matter to be discussed and then asks the group for its opinion regarding his decision. Or the superior may call his subordinates together, ostensibly for a conference, and immediately proceed to lay down the law to them in a speech that lasts perhaps an hour or more. The only resemblance such a meeting holds to a con-

ference lies in the fact that the audience is seated around a table instead of in an auditorium.

Fortunately, not all business conferences are so poorly conducted as these. Occasionally we find an executive who calls a conference because he honestly wishes to secure the opinions of his subordinates on a matter *before* he makes up his own mind on this matter. This executive will lead a real conference, in which the problem is put before the group without any expression of the leader's opinion and threshed out in free and open discussion until a consensus is arrived at. If possible, the wise executive will then put this majority opinion into effect, even though he himself is not entirely in agreement with it. When a group of subordinates have worked hard to solve a problem, then find their considered judgment casually set aside in favor of the opinion of one man, do not expect them to enter with enthusiasm into further conferences conducted by that man.

If the executive's purpose in calling a business meeting is to make a speech to his subordinates, this is, of course, entirely permissible. But such a gathering should be called for the avowed purpose of having a lecture delivered, and not as a conference. Again, if the meeting is called to permit subordinates to discuss a matter of policy that has already been settled by the executive, the meeting is not a true conference. The truth is, many business conferences should never have been called at all, since their purpose was only that of affording a superior an opportunity to pass out information to his subordinates, and this could have been done

much more quickly and effectively without taking these employees away from their work. Too often a conference is called when a memorandum would have accomplished the same results without loss of time and effort. This occurs most commonly in meetings that are scheduled on a regular basis, and which convene whether or not there is anything for the group to discuss.

Actually, there are but two legitimate reasons for calling any business conference. Either the leader wishes to secure ideas from the group, or he wishes to sell an idea to the group. In each instance, the conference is conducted in about the same way. However, in one case the leader intends to abide by the group's decision, and in the other case he intends that the group shall abide by a decision that he has arrived at, although at no time during the conference does he express it or even hint at it.

Some executives are naturally good conference leaders. Others have difficulty in mastering conference technique. Superiors in the first category usually have learned the fallibility of one man's opinion and the worth of several viewpoints on any problem. Those in the second classification are inclined to be impatient of criticism and completely confident in their ability to work out their own problems without assistance from subordinates. Each year we see more of the former type of executive and fewer autocrats in positions of power and responsibility.

If a conference is called as a real conference, with the intention of getting ideas from the group mem-

bers, it should be as carefully planned and conducted as any training conference. The leader must prepare in advance some sort of written plan, even though this takes the form only of a few penciled notes, and he must have this plan before him throughout the meeting. He must have clearly in mind the purpose or aim of the meeting and the motivation on which he intends to rely to get the group's cooperation. He must know about how he intends to word his brief introductory remarks and how to present the major problem to the group members in such a way as to impress them with its importance. Then he must know how to direct discussion in order that everyone present will give his best thought to the problem, so that an intelligent solution may be reached after careful study of all the factors entering into the problem has been carried through.

As was indicated in Chap. II, the leader of a business conference must make himself responsible for the physical conditions of the conference—comfortable seating arrangements for the group (if possible, around an adequate conference table), proper lighting and ventilation, quiet surroundings, and a minimum chance of interruptions occurring during the conference. When it is practicable, conferences should be held in regular conference rooms, not in an executive's private office. In the latter case, the executive usually is comfortably seated behind his desk, while the group members are uncomfortably seated about the room in chairs tilted back against the wall. The leader has no glare in his eyes, but

most of those in the group face glaring lights or windows. There are usually one or two ash trays available, and these are located on the executive's desk, to which the group members who are smoking must trot throughout the conference to dispose of their ashes. The executive's telephone is likely to ring frequently throughout the meeting, and then all discussion is stopped until the leader has finished the conversation.

With the matter of proper physical arrangements for the conference taken care of, the executive must plan his conference beforehand. Following this plan, he will open the meeting with a very short introductory talk, and immediately put before the group the problem, or the first of the series of problems, to be considered at that meeting. The conference leader who is the superior of his group members must watch himself very closely or he will talk too much in leading a discussion. Likewise, there is in this situation more danger that group members will attempt to "shake hands" with the leader by endeavoring to find out what he wants them to say, then saying this rather than expressing their true convictions. Particularly in a business conference, "apple polishing" must be severely discouraged by the executive conference leader, or else nothing worth while will be accomplished in the conference. In this connection, it is especially important that the executive learn to avoid registering his personal reaction to any contributions made by group members who are his subordinates.

The common practice of calling on group mem-



bers for responses is more to be deplored in a business conference than in other types of meeting, again for the reason that the leader of a business conference is likely to be the superior of the group members. This procedure of putting the subordinates "on the spot" when they are not yet ready to express an opinion is bad, not only as it affects the conference itself, but also as it affects the future relationship between the executive and his subordinate. Persisted in at frequently recurring conferences, this practice can create unnecessary friction between superior and employee. If the leader will but recollect his own feeling of resentment when he has thus been called on for an opinion in conference at a moment when he had nothing to say on the subject, he may take the trouble to learn other methods of getting everyone in his conference group to talk. Throughout these pages there are many suggestions of methods to be employed in encouraging group members to respond without the necessity of calling on them for contributions to the discussion.

In training several hundred executives as conference leaders, I have had difficulty in convincing some of these men that they can get results in a conference without doing much of the talking themselves. I have even known executives to protest that their subordinates would "think they were dumb" if they put a problem before these employees, then let them solve it without help from the boss. Actually, there is no indication of weakness in the attitude of a superior who frankly tells his subordinates that their combined brains are

worth a lot to him in running his job. Instead of considering him "dumb," they feel they are working for a man who is clever enough to make good use of all the brain power in his organization.

Properly planned and conducted, the business conference can become one of the most valuable instruments of executive control that any superior can possess. Through the medium of the conference the executive not only can develop ideas from his subordinates that never would have occurred to him, but at the same time he can sell these ideas to his employees. Every executive knows the difference in response to an order the reason for which is thoroughly understood by his people, and the reaction to one that calls only for blind obedience.

In conference, the wise executive frequently succeeds in having the suggestions for an important change in policy come from the subordinates themselves. All that is necessary then is to permit the subordinates, through discussion, to sell themselves on the necessity for this change; when, finally, he places his own stamp of approval on it, the measure can go immediately into effect. In such a case, there will be no friction occasioned by the new order and no opposition to its enactment, since it originated with those who are to carry it out. If it should happen that the group's conclusion, arrived at after thoughtful discussion, differs somewhat from the preconceived opinions of the leader, the group's ideas should be put into effect, at least for the time being. Later on, if the executive's original ideas appear to have been better than those of the group,

it will require but little amendment of the order to take care of discrepancies. The point is that no group of subordinates should be asked to assist in formulating policy and then have their suggestions ignored. The executive who does not trust the combined wisdom of his lieutenants to the extent of acting upon it should discontinue conducting conferences with them.

If an executive is having difficulty in getting results in the conferences he conducts, there are certain steps he can take to remedy the situation. Since there are only a certain number of factors that can operate to make any business conference a failure, it is possible to outline a questionnaire that any executive can apply to his own conferences, and by so doing evaluate his own work as a conference leader. Let the executive check his conferences on the following important points.

1. *Do you plan your conferences carefully?* Most poor business conferences are poorly planned. The executive gets an idea which, he believes, justifies calling a meeting of subordinates. Without planning the meeting in detail he rushes into the conference, only to discover that he is not prepared to meet many of the eventualities that combine to make the conference a failure. Or, regular departmental meetings have been scheduled and these must convene whether or not there is necessity for them, and whether or not sufficient agenda have been properly prepared for the occasion.

Never call a conference unless there is a definite need for the meeting—something to be accomplished

that cannot be taken care of just as well by some other medium, such as a memorandum, which does not needlessly consume so much time. Nothing is more wasteful of time and energy than the regularly scheduled semiweekly, or weekly, departmental meeting for which no particular preparation has been made. Occasionally, more by accident than otherwise, one of these meetings will be successful, but the usual run of such conferences is discouraging both to the leader and to the group.

Too often the leader, having made no preparation at all for the meeting, passes the buck to the group by opening the conference with some such remark as "Well, what shall we talk about today?" If no one in the group has anything on his mind either, there will be no conference. If the group members half-heartedly attempt to stir up a bit of discussion, well and good, but no credit for this should go to the leader. In general, the place to submit bare suggestions for improvement of the business is in a suggestion box, not in a conference.

Actually, a plan should have been prepared for this meeting. The executive should know exactly how much time he expects to devote to this conference, and he should know in advance what will be going on during each quarter hour of the meeting. With a little practice this is not difficult of accomplishment. It is not necessary to draw up an elaborate conference plan, but it is essential that the leader have in mind in advance the general questions to be discussed during the meeting, and that he know about what he expects to accomplish by their

discussion. In general, this calls for ability on the executive's part to foresee the effect of certain questions on the group, and to forecast accurately the reaction of individual group members to certain motivation. In this connection it is suggested that some study be given by the executive to Chaps. III and V.

2. *Do you talk too much when leading a conference?* For some reason most executives dislike to be told that they talk too much when leading a conference, even though this fact is perfectly obvious to the expert observer of their meetings. There is nothing to resent in such a criticism. For many years the value of the ability to speak extemporaneously has been emphasized as part of the executive's equipment for his job. It is perfectly natural, then, that having trained himself as a speaker, he will feel the urge to talk whenever he faces an audience. And some experience must be acquired before the average executive can distinguish between a conference group and an audience.

Elsewhere we have stated that the leader's participation never should exceed 25 per cent of the entire talking done in the conference, and that 20 per cent or less is a better participation factor. Obviously, then, if the executive speaks every time one of his group members speaks, he is talking too much, for his participation factor will be as much as 50. When the leader talks too much the group loses interest in the proceedings. The members may enjoy listening to the executive's dissertation, but they are not thereby encouraged to participate in discus-

sion, and that is the only justifiable purpose for convening any conference group.

Experienced conference leaders often find it necessary to check the extent of their own participation in a meeting. To do this they do not depend on their own impressions. It is difficult for a leader to analyze his own actions while leading a conference. Rather, it is better to depend on someone else for this service. Usually there will be a secretary in attendance at any conference. This assistant may determine the leader's participation factor in one of two ways. Either she may make a spot check at various times throughout a meeting of the frequency of participation of the leader and that of the group, or she may take down a verbatim report of the entire conference. By either method the leader then has a check on the extent of his participation in the discussion. If the verbatim report is made, it also may be used by the leader as a means for studying the development of ideas in his group, and as an index to the contributions of individual group members, making it possible to determine which of these are making the greatest effort to be helpful in the discussions. When complete stenographic reports are made of all conferences, it sometimes happens that there develops a reluctance on the part of group members to talk, since they feel that every word they utter is taken down and may later reappear to their discredit. For this reason such complete reports should be taken only occasionally.

The conference leader can, of course, also talk too little in leading a discussion, as is indicated when

he fails to prevent the group's wandering from the subject or when he neglects to use a follow-up question at the proper time. The only reason I say little about the too-reticent conference leader in these suggestions is that I have found he is so very much in the minority. Most conference leaders talk more than they should.

3. *Are 80 per cent of your conferences with subordinates developmental in nature?* When an executive learns to lead conferences in which he can sell his ideas to his group, it sometimes happens that he overworks this method of presentation. In nearly all his conferences with subordinates he attempts to put over, by indirection, his own ideas, instead of actually seeking ideas from the group. As I have said, the selling conference should be held infrequently with any group, and particularly is this true when the group is made up of an executive's subordinates. Perhaps 20 per cent of such departmental meetings may be planned with the view of selling an idea of the executive's to the group. The remaining 80 per cent of the conferences should be purely developmental in nature, with the leader honestly searching for new ideas, rather than attempting to sell his own ideas to the group. The selling conferences should be scattered at random among the developmental conferences.

The reason for this should be obvious. Unless a group of subordinates is very stupid, they will soon discover that the meetings are being conducted solely in order that the leader may put over his own ideas to the group. When subordinates appreciate



this fact they may lose all interest in the meetings, feeling that nothing they say will be given importance unless it agrees with something already decided on by the executive. On the other hand, when 80 per cent of the meetings are really developmental, planned to bring out as many brand-new ideas as possible, the group's attitude toward all the meetings will be good and the selling conferences can be inserted into the series without affecting the group's morale.

4. *Do you override the consensus of your subordinates?* An executive opens a conference with his subordinates with the assertion that he wishes the group members to reach an agreement on the matter under discussion, in order that this consensus may become standard practice in the department. After the group has given careful consideration to the problem and finally expressed a majority opinion, concurred in perhaps by nearly all in the group, the executive decides that he does not like this opinion and overrides it by formulating an arbitrary rule of his own that reverses the judgment of his subordinates.

Later on, this executive opens another meeting with a similar statement of his desire for the cooperation of the subordinates in solving a problem. The group responds poorly and shows little interest in the matter. Its members feel that, no matter what they say, the boss will follow a line of procedure he already has outlined. The subordinates wonder why they must be called away from their



work to participate in a conference that has no meaning for them.

When an executive overrides just once a group's expressed consensus, he will have trouble in holding resultful discussions with that group in the future. Either he should tell the group that he will adopt only those of their ideas with which he happens to agree, or he should keep his word and put the group's consensus into effect in the operation of the department.

5. *Do your subordinates enjoy attending conferences led by you?* At one time there were executives who would have answered this question by saying, "What do I care whether they *enjoy* attending my conferences? They're getting paid to attend them." Nowadays, however, executives know that conferences are most productive of results when those attending enjoy themselves. This does not mean that the group must be entertained. It does not necessarily mean that the group will laugh frequently, although probably humorous situations will arise from time to time during most meetings.

But your subordinates must enjoy attending your conferences or these meetings will not amount to much. Their enjoyment will depend entirely on how you conduct the conference. They will enjoy themselves if they are permitted to work out problems through open discussion, knowing that most of their ideas will be put into effect. They will enjoy themselves if they are not called on for responses, if the leader keeps the discussion on the subject, if he does not show favoritism, if he pre-

vents certain group members from hogging the discussion. Any group enjoys a good laugh once in a while, especially one that develops spontaneously from the discussion rather than one that dutifully follows the telling of a funny story by the boss.

Group members enjoy themselves when the physical arrangements for the conference are such that they can be comfortable. They keenly enjoy the conflict of that difference of opinion that makes any conference interesting. They enjoy expressing themselves freely in conference, without fear that something they say may later be used against them.

Pay attention to the reaction of the members of your conference groups before, during, and after a meeting, either spoken reactions or those indicated by facial expressions or actions. If in their faces you see boredom or resentment, or if you get the impression that these people would rather be in some other place than in attendance at your conference, you will do well to check up on your conference leadership. In this connection, note particularly the attitude of your group at the close of the conference. If most of the members register relief that the meeting is over and appear eager to rush from the room, you may be sure they have not enjoyed themselves at your meeting. The ideal condition at the close of a conference obtains when the leader has some difficulty in stopping discussion and the group evinces a desire to continue the conference even after the meeting has been adjourned by the leader.

6. *Can you lead an inspirational conference?*

Many an executive can lead a fair developmental conference and, under ordinary circumstances, this may be all that will be required of him. On occasion, however, a conference may have for its objective the creation of a new mood or spirit in the entire group. At such times a conference may do more to accomplish this purpose than can any amount of oratory. I have found it extremely difficult to teach the technique of conducting an inspirational conference—if, indeed, such a technique exists. However, in the course of your regular conferences you may note whether or not you have the ability to develop occasional strong emotional reactions from your group. If you have not this faculty, you will do well to rely on the use of pep talks when it is desirable to inspire your subordinates to unusual effort. But if you find that you can lead inspirational conferences, by all means develop this quality to the highest possible degree. Someday your ability to inspire a group in conference may become of great value to you and to your organization.

In all business conferences there enters an important factor that is less evident in any other type of conference—such, for example, as the training conference. The factor referred to concerns the previous general relationship of the executive with his subordinates. Much that transpires in any business conference may have its origin, not in the leader's planning or execution of that particular conference,

but in contacts between executive and subordinates extending back over a period of years.

So much of the success of a business conference depends on past dealings between leader and group that it sometimes becomes impossible for an executive to lead resultful meetings with his subordinates until he has made certain changes in his supervisory relationship with these subordinates. The executive who has, in the past, been overbearing toward his lieutenants or less than fair in his dealings with them, may have difficulty in getting these people to discuss frankly and honestly any problem put before them. They fear to say what they think lest their statements later may react to their disadvantage. Conversely, the executive whose relations with his subordinates have been too easygoing will have difficulty in leading conferences with them for the obvious reason that he cannot sufficiently command their respect, and therefore he fails to retain control of the conference situation. Until this executive tightens up his general supervisory procedure, and demands increased respect from his subordinates in his daily contacts with them, his conferences will not be very productive.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SELLING BY CONFERENCE METHOD

In training business executives as conference leaders, in university extension classes, I permit one student to lead discussion on each class night. While this student acts as leader, the remainder of the class serves as the conference group, and later these students make a critical rating of the executive's ability as a leader of discussion.

One of the points that the class takes into consideration in making its rating is whether or not the leader actually attained his objective in this practice conference. In order to make it easy for the group to determine this fact, the student leader must place in the center of the table, before opening his conference, a sealed envelope containing a statement of his objective in the meeting. If, for example, a given question may be decided by the group, after discussion, either in the affirmative or in the negative, the leader must state which conclusion he intended should be arrived at. More than 90 per cent of the time, the student leader's prognostication of the group's final decision is accurate.

This happens because the leader has earlier learned to evaluate his discussion questions and thus to predetermine the probable conclusions at which the group will arrive. It happens, moreover, be-

cause the leader knows how to direct discussion into previously planned channels. In other words, it is possible to plan and conduct a conference in such a way that there is reasonable certainty as to what the final agreement of the group will be. Yet at no time will the leader give any evidence of the conclusion he is working toward, nor, indeed, will he indicate that he is working toward any conclusion at all. It should be at once evident that here is an instrument of great value to every executive—the ability, for example, to secure from his subordinates suggestions for the adoption of a line of procedure that these same subordinates might resent if arbitrarily decreed by the executive.

What may not be so obvious, however, is that the conference, properly planned and conducted, may also become a means par excellence for selling your ideas to any group of people. The only two stipulations I make are, first, that your ideas must be of such an order that they can be made *reasonable* to these people; and, secondly, that you do not attempt this technique too frequently on the same group. Within these limits, if you are any sort of salesman at all, you can, without ever actually arguing the merits of your ideas or wares, make them appear as the most acceptable solution to the problem before the group.

In conducting a selling conference it is important to be particularly careful to avoid any faintest appearance of bias in your statements and in the phrasing of your questions. Do not let any evidence of your own desires appear, even in the in-

flection of your voice. The only exception to this rule occurs when you are forced by circumstances to adopt the "negative" method of conference leading, which is explained later in this chapter.

Selling by conference method has the advantage over selling by the salesman's conventional argumentative method in that there is little sales resistance to overcome. The group may be a board of directors, a governmental board, or it may be made up of the heads of departments of a great corporation. The members of the group may all be strangers to you. They know that you have a proposition to put before them. But when the meeting opens they are at once involved in a discussion that is of absorbing interest to them. The discussion bears on the general idea you have in mind, but does not actually embrace it.

As the conference proceeds, you begin to ask follow-up questions, each of which is based on a response made by some group member to the original discussion question. As is explained in Chap. XII, these follow-up questions give direction to the discussion because you are basing them only on those responses that embody at least the germ of the idea you wish to develop from this group.

Understand, you are not hoodwinking this group. You cannot sell your idea to them unless it is a *reasonable* idea and one whose execution, in their opinion, will benefit them and the organization they represent. But, granting these premises, by this method you can sell such a group an idea that you might never be able to put over by oral suasion, and



you can do this with little fuss and with the expenditure of no more than the normal amount of effort involved in any selling operation.

The first follow-up question concentrates the attention of the group on one phase of the discussion which is favorable to your interest, or which you believe can be made to favor the conclusion you wish the group to reach. Then the second follow-up question narrows the field a little more. As the conference continues, the discussion rolls smoothly along, without any sense of being rushed toward any conclusion at all. There is a spirit of amity and good fellowship in the group, and some of this feeling extends from the group to include the leader. Occasionally a real laugh, at no one's expense, develops from the discussion itself, and this lightens the mood of the more serious-minded members of the group. Not only has this group the satisfaction of solving a problem, but it is evident, besides, that everyone present is enjoying himself and would rather be where he is than in any other place.

As the discussion continues, any difference of opinion that develops will be between two or more factions of the group rather than between the group and the leader. By his complete fairness, the leader wins the liking and respect of all factions, and this is an excellent position to be in when you are trying to sell something.

By proper direction of discussion, the leader within a period of perhaps an hour or so can, if necessary, have the suggestion he favors come from the group itself. Then it is only a question of satis-



ying himself that a majority of the members favor this idea before a vote is taken. Individual group members, in their spoken reactions at the time the suggestion is made, and by their facial expressions, will indicate their opinion. Through experience, the leader knows when a group is preponderantly sold on an idea and when a majority opposes it. The time to call for a showing of hands, of course, is that moment when the group obviously favors the suggestion before it, said suggestion being the leader's idea as expressed by some group member.

If, before the final vote is taken, certain modifications of the leader's idea are suggested, and these can be incorporated without injury to the idea (they may even improve it), so much the better. Then the group, having to that extent put its mark on the idea, will feel that the plan is more than ever its own.

If a group is friendly and cooperative, or if it is possessed of but a normal amount of skepticism, and your idea is reasonable, you can sell it by conference method. If, however, from the outset of the meeting, the group, or a majority of its members, is unfriendly or perhaps even actively hostile to you, then you may wish to adopt the negative method of conference leading previously referred to.

This method of conference leading is based on the psychology of employing the ill will of your opponent in order to attain your own ends. You take advantage of the rancor of the group that is bent on your undoing, and cause this spleen to work in your behalf. To accomplish this, it is only neces-

sary to put before the group a discussion question, then to indicate your preference for a solution of this question by every indirect means that occurs to you. Among other devices, in delivering your follow-up questions you will apply inflections that will lead the group members to feel that they know the answer you hope to get. Or you will ask questions that are leading in nature, or show displeasure at those responses with which you really are in whole-hearted agreement.

A hostile group will watch the leader much more closely than will a friendly group. They are anxious to defeat his interests, and will instinctively oppose every indication he gives of his desires and wishes. If the leader's every indication is misleading, the group's animosity eventually puts the members in the position of strongly sponsoring the proposition which the leader ostensibly opposes with equal force. When a sufficient number of group members have committed themselves in this fashion, the leader should at once put the question and take the vote. Afterward, when certain individuals may have become aware of what has been done and show an inclination to hedge on their expressed opinion, the conference is dismissed.

This negative method works out well in practice, much more smoothly, indeed, than it sounds in print. That it is entirely justified is evident when you consider that any conference is, in some degree, a battle of wits between the group on the one hand and the lone leader on the other. When the group is antagonistic this situation becomes extremely in-

tensified. Yet I have never known of a case in which the negative method of conference leading failed when properly applied to an obstreperous group. But don't try it too often on the same group, and be sure that you are a sufficiently good poker player to dissemble successfully before you try it at all.

Another form of selling by conference method may be successfully practiced when your prospect is an individual rather than a group, most of whose members must be sold on your proposition before it goes into effect. Many salesmen are somewhat familiar with this latter technique, although they usually make use of it but sparingly, and only in handling difficult customers. Actually, it may be used frequently, and both the prospect and the salesman will enjoy the experience. It may be spoken of as "conducting a one-man conference."

In applying this technique it is customary for the salesman to state his proposition to the buyer quickly and concisely at the opening of the interview. Then, and before the prospect has a chance to say "No" (which he obviously is about to do), the salesman asks him an extremely thought-provoking question on a subject somewhat foreign to that of the sale, but very close to the buyer's heart. The salesman's knowledge of his prospect should make the selection of such a subject a simple matter.

The one-man conference then begins. I have, on a number of occasions, led such a conference for as long as an hour with an executive who had originally

limited the interview to 10 minutes. At no time did I offend while overstaying the allotted time, for I simply could not get away. Once the executive got started on his favorite subject, with a sympathetic listener who knew exactly what follow-up questions to slip into the one-man discussion from time to time, there was no stopping him until he had reached a good stopping place.

At no time during the latter part of such an interview was the subject of my call mentioned. The executive had my story, and may perhaps have been digesting it in the back of his head while he talked of other matters. In any case, the conclusion of such an interview is almost invariably the same. The executive suddenly realizes that he has been talking to you about *his* troubles for nearly an hour, while *your* problem, which occasioned the interview, has had no consideration during that time.

When the executive breaks off his monologue he will at once revert back to your proposition and say something like, "Now, about that proposition of yours. I think your idea has merit, and I want you to talk to my department heads about it." But if that prospect had made his decision before you led the one-man conference, his answer would have been an emphatic "No!" And after he had taken that stand, no future argument would have prevailed to change his mind.

What changed his attitude? Certainly nothing in the salesman's argument. Rather, perhaps, the prospect felt that he had been talking too much, and in order to rationalize his verbosity, pretended

that all this time had been given to his consideration of the merits of your proposition. Then, being in an amiable frame of mind as far as you were concerned—principally because of your demonstrated ability as a good listener—he decided to give your proposition further consideration. Whatever the reason, this method of selling often succeeds where direct argument fails. Any salesman who can conduct a good conference (and who therefore knows when to remain silent) can sell by this method.

When selling by conference method to a group of people, such as a board of directors or the department heads of a corporation, it should be borne in mind that these hard-headed businessmen are accustomed to being harangued by salesmen who have been taught to talk hard and fast in order to sell their wares. It is in the nature of a holiday for these men to be approached by someone who does not employ such methods. Possibly, some of these gentlemen may even feel a little sorry for the salesman who appears to possess so little of the gift of smooth delivery that they have learned to associate with selling. This feeling of sympathy may well react to the salesman's benefit.

The conference that ensues is a pleasant experience for one of these businessmen. He is not obviously being sold anything, therefore it is not necessary for him to remember to keep his sales resistance intact. He can relax and derive some enjoyment from the discussion.

If the salesman knows his business as a conference leader, this discussion will never concern itself with

the question of whether or not the company shall purchase his service or wares. Rather, the discussion revolves about the problem of which type of service or which model of machine—either of which the salesman can furnish—would best suit the needs of the prospective customer. When such a conference is properly conducted it is not difficult to overlook or minimize the effect of the infrequent complaint of some group member that insufficient thought is being given to the matter of deciding whether or not to buy, while too much time is being consumed in determining which of two or more items should be purchased.

I have found the conference method of selling most helpful in promoting the sale of an intangible service to large corporations. Sometimes the sale must be made to a board of directors. At other times the man to be sold is the general manager. Again, all these officials may decline to make a decision in the matter, and you are passed along to a group of department heads. If you can sell this latter group of executives, your work is done. But department heads, as a rule, are much more difficult to sell than is any board of directors. This is true because they are less frequently called on to make important decisions of policy such as may be involved in your proposition, and therefore take their joint responsibility more seriously than do the members of a board of directors, who have become accustomed to making momentous decisions daily.

In selling to groups of department heads by conference method, I have found the simplest method

is that of giving the assembled executives a sample of what I have to offer. As an example, for many years I sold my own services to corporations as a consultant in employee training. If I happened to be placing emphasis on the installation of a foremanship training program in that concern, I would lead a demonstration conference with the department heads on one of the subjects included in this course of training. Since the group members were themselves supervisors, this subject would interest these department heads just as much as it would interest a group of foremen. If the subject was properly chosen and correctly presented, there would be little difficulty in obtaining an affirmative vote at the conclusion of the conference, when the question "Do you consider that participation in discussions of the type we have just completed would be of value to your foremen and supervisors?" was put to the group. Or it might be considered advisable to leave the room at the close of the demonstration conference and permit the department heads to discuss this question among themselves in your absence.

Just how far this demonstration method could be applied in the sale of tangibles it would be necessary for the individual salesman to decide for himself. But I am convinced that any group of department heads will react much more quickly and favorably to a practical demonstration of your product, tangible or intangible, than to any amount of cleverly worded argument. There is something in

the training of a supervisor that makes him more skeptical than any purchasing agent.

For the salesman who wishes to remove his selling technique as far as possible from any suspicion of high-pressure procedure, it might be well that he develop skill at selling by the indirect method embodied in the conference. When it can be employed at all, it becomes an enjoyable experience both for the salesman and for the prospect.



## CHAPTER IX

### TEACHING BY CONFERENCE METHOD

In order to participate intelligently in a conference, the individuals who comprise the group must have knowledge and experience on which to draw, in line with the problem under discussion. This is the basic requirement for any conference. Recognition of this fact simplifies the task of deciding whether a particular subject may be taught by conference method, or whether the usual means of lecture, demonstration, and illustration must be employed in order that the new ideas may be put over.

Thus it becomes at once evident that most of the subjects taught in public school and college do not lend themselves to conference instruction. The student of algebra or French, for example, probably has had no previous contact with the body of knowledge that the teacher is about to impart. Only in the college seminar, where the students are presumed to possess information on which to draw for discussions, is conference instruction employed to any extent in our educational institutions.

When we look at the field of industrial arts and commercial education, however, and particularly when we consider the training of adults already gainfully employed in industry and commerce, the situation is changed. When, for example, a corpo-

ration decides to give its workmen training in accident prevention, it should be obvious to those who will administer this training that these employees have been avoiding accidents for many years previous to the installation of the training program, and therefore already know a considerable amount about this subject from experience. In some cases, indeed, it may develop that the employees in the aggregate know more about the subject of safety than does the instructor who has been detailed to teach safety to them.

The same reasoning applies to such subjects as supervision, public relations training, advanced salesmanship, executive training, and certain types of advanced job training. Whenever upgrading training programs are to be instituted in factories, public utilities, merchandising establishments, and offices, it must be remembered that the employees to be trained may already be well acquainted with the subject in which they are to receive training. What they know about it they have gained by experience. Theirs is perhaps unorganized knowledge, sketchy and incomplete in spots. But it is extremely valuable knowledge, principally because it is based on experience. Certainly it constitutes sufficient background to justify the use of the conference method of instruction whenever training is to be given to employees in the subjects mentioned above.

Sometimes a serious mistake is made in this connection. Those responsible for the installation of an employee training program, in harking back to their

own educational experience for guidance, will assume that the thing to do is to bring into the organization a high-pressure lecturer, who will tell the men and women how to run their jobs. Too often this is done, with a consequent complete lack of accomplishment as far as improving employee performance is concerned.

As a matter of fact, it was just such a misdirection of training effort that led to the adoption of conference training on a large scale in industrial and commercial employee training. When it became evident, about as far back as 1910, that factory foremen needed instruction in improved methods of handling their subordinates, management cast about for the best method of handling this situation. Naturally enough, these executives first attempted to meet the situation in terms of the only kind of school with which they were familiar. They brought in lecturers to tell these rough-and-ready fellows how to supervise people. Equally natural, too, was the reaction of the burly foreman. He laughed in the face of this very unforemanlike-appearing lecturer who had the audacity to come into his shop and tell him how to handle men. In a body, the foremen walked out of the classroom before the lecturer could really get warmed up to his subject.

In searching for a method of training that would be acceptable to the factory foreman, Charles R. Allen and his contemporaries, in 1914, hit on the idea of a series of conferences, in which the leader would carefully refrain from lecture, and the group, instead, would be encouraged to exchange ideas re-

garding their common problems in supervision. Out of these original foremanship training conferences there were developed the methods and technique now used in all conference instruction. Today, the conference method is universally accepted as the best method available, not only for upgrading industrial and commercial employees, but for training any group of people in subjects in which they already have had practical experience.

In the earliest supervisory training conferences it was discovered that foremen who bitterly resented being told how to run their jobs could nevertheless learn from each other how to handle subordinates. No matter how hard-boiled or opinionated a foreman happened to be, it was soon evident that he was perfectly willing to try out methods of supervision which his brother foremen had found made their work easier, and which at the same time resulted in increased production.

It soon became evident, also, that the best leader for foremanship training groups was not an expert on the subject of supervision, but a man who could develop the greatest amount of thoughtful discussion from a group of men who were themselves experts in supervision. Out of this theory and experimentation has developed the best work that has been done in employee training in America during the past quarter century.

Supervisory training conferences were led, not by men with the greatest experience in supervision, but by good conference leaders. Safety training was developed by men who knew how to bring out

from a group of employees all that they had learned during many years' experience in a hazardous occupation, and to make this aggregate knowledge available to every member in the group. This conference leader was not necessarily an expert in the science of accident prevention. Likewise with instructors in public relations training, in advanced sales training, and in each of the applications that have been made of the conference method of teaching in commerce and industry. Unlike every other teacher, the instructors in these groups were not required to be exceptionally well informed in the subjects they taught. Indeed, whenever a conference leader began to feel that he knew more about the subject under discussion than did his entire group, he forthwith ceased to be valuable as a conference leader. It is this fact that has made it so difficult for the conventional teacher to understand or master the technique of the conference method of instruction.

The conference leader must approach his teaching job in a very humble spirit if he is to be successful at this work. He dare not set himself up as an expert in the subjects he is to teach. He must not allow himself to feel superior in knowledge to his group. Indeed, he must be firmly convinced that his group, as a whole, knows more about the subject under discussion than he does. Instead of conceiving of himself as a fount of knowledge, the good conference leader visualizes himself as an intermediary. His job is that of developing information from a score of individuals who have had much experi-

ence, and making this total knowledge available to every person present.

It is because this method of instruction is so extremely efficacious, when the students are employees who have had experience in the field in question, that experts are so often astonished at the results attained through this type of instruction. It is difficult for the educator who has gained most of his knowledge from books and lectures to understand whence has come this new knowledge, which the students undoubtedly now possess, yet which was not taught them out of books or by lecture method. The expert must learn to appreciate that there exists an enormous reservoir of neglected knowledge which has never found its way into books, but which has been passed on from employee to employee for many generations. Also, although each generation of employees adds something to this body of knowledge, individual workers possess only a portion of this information. It is only when groups of such employees are gathered together in conferences, and their knowledge is brought out and distributed through the entire group, that each member of the group acquires the sum of the learning that was formerly spread among the individual workmen in that industry.

When the conference leader becomes thoroughly convinced that his real job is to act as an intermediary in the development of knowledge through thoughtful discussion, he has little difficulty in understanding that his objective must be the acquisition of skill as a leader of discussion rather than

to endeavor to become an expert in all the fields in which he may be teaching. Likewise, this conference leader can understand why it is entirely possible to develop a complete course outline for conference instruction from the group that is to be trained.

This method of developing a course outline from the group can be applied to any course in conference training. It is very effective, particularly when the groups are aware that they are developing their own course of study, since this adds verity to the flat statement of the leader in his opening conference, "I'm not here to tell you people anything. I want you to tell me."

Let us suppose that the leader wishes to develop a course outline for a supervisory training course. In this case, he opens the series with a conference in which the supervisors are asked to make an analysis of their responsibilities. Since these responsibilities—for production, for development of employee morale, for the physical condition of subordinates, for cooperation, and so on—determine the daily duties of any supervisor, they form an excellent guide in preparing a course outline.

With such a comprehensive outline before him, the training supervisor can readily prepare sets of discussion questions intended to promote thoughtful discussion on each responsibility of the supervisor.<sup>1</sup> The same method of procedure applies when the training applies to subjects other than supervision.

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VI in "Employee Training," by the author, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1942.



A fine, practical course of study in accident prevention is created when the leader, at the opening conference of the series, asks the employees the question, "What are the underlying causes of accidents in our department?" and then follows this development by permitting the group to arrange these underlying causes—*negligence, haste, worry, fear*, and so on—in an order of importance.<sup>1</sup> When the underlying causes of accidents have thus been weighted, each then becomes the subject of one or more conferences on accident prevention, with the most important underlying cause properly forming the subject for discussion in the opening conference of the course of training. (Samples of safety questions appear at the end of Chap. IV.)

While the leader of training conferences does not need to be an expert in the subject he is teaching, it is well if he has a fair understanding of it. Perhaps it may be said that he should know more of the subject than his group suspects. Whether or not he is well versed in it at first, certain it is that, after having led a number of discussions on the same subject with diverse group types, eventually he will absorb a surprising amount of information from his group members.

Certainly, in many conferences, the leader learns as much as does any student in his group. At first the leader may make the mistake of assuming that all the ideas to be developed from the discussion of a given question have been brought out by the first group in which he hears it discussed. Then he listens to another group's discussion of this same

<sup>1</sup>See p. 39 in "How to Supervise People," 2d ed., by the author, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1946.



question and finds that they bring out yet more ideas on the subject. Only after the leader has heard the question discussed many times by groups of many types does the discussion fail to develop ideas on the subject that are new to him. Only then can the leader assume that he is beginning to get a comprehensive grasp of that phase of supervision, or accident prevention, or selling, or whatever the subject may be with which the discussion concerns itself.

Not until he has heard a subject discussed many, many times should the leader of training conferences ever attempt to direct the discussion to a particular conclusion. If he essays this while as yet he possesses too restricted a knowledge of the subject, he most certainly will make it increasingly difficult for members to bring out new and original ideas on the subject under discussion. This should be obvious, since the essential technique for directing discussion into particular channels necessitates action on the part of the leader to close other channels that the group might otherwise wish to explore.

However, when long experience has taught the leader that certain channels in the discussion are dead-end ones, and that their continued exploration constitutes only a waste of time and effort, he should begin definitely to direct discussion toward useful conclusions. Also, while doing this the leader should, by asking the right follow-up question at the right moment, make sure that the group *does* explore every channel of the discussion that, in his

opinion, justifies the necessary expenditure of time. In this way the leader stops discussion that, to his certain knowledge, will lead nowhere, and encourages and develops discussion that will give the group a complete picture of the problem before it is asked to make a decision in the matter.

Here is the real difference between the leaderless round-table discussion, or the poorly conducted seminar, and a true training conference. In the case of the round table, or of any discussion in which the leadership is weak and uncertain, there is a lot of talk but not very much accomplishment. Rarely does a group member change his preconceived opinions as a result of the discussion, and this is not good. Without adequate leadership the loudest mouthed individual present does most of the talking, whether or not he has anything to say worth listening to, while the more quiet-mannered group members have little opportunity to express what may well be really important contributions to the discussion.

In the bona fide training conference, conducted by an experienced discussion leader, each group member has his opportunity to talk, but not at the expense of others. When the loud-mouthed one attempts to seize the floor, he is gently but firmly quashed, and the more intelligent, but perhaps less assertive, group members are encouraged to respond. With dead-end channels closed to discussion, every word spoken is then worth listening to. An observer can sense that each moment is bringing the group closer to a solution of the problem—a solution that

is satisfactory not merely to the leader, but to a majority of the group as well.

In addition to the consensus reached at the conclusion of discussion of each question, there is frequently developed in conference training programs another sort of consensus. This takes the form of a question-and-answer compendium prepared by an entire group of employees, which epitomizes many rules of conduct for the guidance of these employees in their daily work. Such a compilation ordinarily is referred to as a "standard practice" in the subject under consideration. There may be prepared standard practice in accident prevention, in supervision, in salesmanship, or in public contacting. At present, standard practice preparation is most common as a by-product of conference training programs in public contacting.

The preparation of standard practice material is a natural outgrowth of conference discussion. When a case problem is put before a group for solution, an agreement is reached concerning its solution. When a hundred-odd problems relating to one field of employee activity have been solved, there has been built up a certain body of knowledge concerning that activity. This information is valuable both to the employee who sat in the conference and to the new employee who needs just this information in the early days of his employment in that department. Therefore, standard practice is developed through discussion, and the questions and answers become codified rules of conduct, prepared by the

employees and revised and approved by management as an official guide to employee conduct.

Standard practice development is an excellent goal to keep in sight in the administration of any conference training program. It adds permanency to the work done in conference, and the training groups enjoy the novelty of preparing their own rules of conduct. In addition, the discussions that precede the acceptance by the group of the wording of each single rule as standard constitute instruction of the highest order. Assuming that the employee performance epitomized in the standard practice is the best conceivable, then it may be further assumed that each employee who participates in the discussion through which it is prepared is entirely familiar with it and has tacitly accepted it as his own standard of performance.

After complete standard practice in any subject has been prepared, this material is assembled and issued to each employee whose duties are affected by it. Then, in order to make certain that each employee has mastered these rules, a review check, or true-and-false test, is given. This same test is given also to new employees, about 30 days after they have been furnished with copies of the standard practice covering their duties.

It is important to emphasize that in standard practice preparation care should be observed to avoid making the compilation a collection of hard and fast rules. It is, for example, dangerous to furnish an employee with but one or two standard replies to a customer's question and expect these re-

plies to take care of the wide variations of situation that inevitably occur in such instances. Rather, standard practice should furnish the employee with as much accurate information as possible, and then should emphasize the employee's responsibility for incorporating this information into replies couched in his own words.

A recent development in employee training by conference method assists yet further in assuring the application by the employee of this standard practice to his job. In this innovation, instead of staff instructors conducting the conferences, every supervisor of a group of employees under training leads the training conferences with his own subordinates. When this system—known as the rehearsed-conference method of training—is employed, each supervisor receives special instruction in conference leadership. Under this system the educational director, instead of leading conferences himself, becomes primarily a teacher-trainer, developing conference leaders in the organization in which he is employed—perhaps scores or even hundreds of them.

Since, as we have already noted, the qualifications of a good supervisor and those of a good conference leader are almost identical, it is quite possible to develop the average department or section head into a fairly efficient instructor, at least insofar as his own subordinates are concerned. What he may lack in leadership technique is more than compensated for eventually by the unique relationship that exists between himself and his subordinates. It is to his supervisor that the average employee natu-

rally looks for instruction. And when certain agreements regarding employee performance have been reached in a conference led by the employee's supervisor, no one but the supervisor is in quite so good a position to see to it that these new ideas and methods are put into effect on the job.

In another book I have developed in some detail the exact procedure by which the rehearsed-conference method of employee training is installed in any organization.<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of the present discussion it is necessary only to sketch briefly this method of installation. As its name implies, this system of training calls for the supervisor's attendance at a "rehearsal" meeting before he leads a similar conference with his subordinates. Shortly before each scheduled "round" of employee meetings, the educational director calls all supervisors of the division in question into a rehearsal meeting. At that meeting the educational director leads the identical conference that each supervisor present later will lead with his own employees.

In the rehearsal meeting the supervisor-conference leaders act as the discussion group, and at the same time study the methods of the educational director in leading the conference. After the demonstration conference has been completed, the supervisors discuss methods of presentation of this material. Before the rehearsal meeting is dismissed, each supervisor is supplied with a detailed conference plan for the meeting he is to conduct, and, in addi-

<sup>1</sup>See Chap. IV in "Employee Training," by the author, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1942.

tion, any other material he will require in the meeting he is to hold with his subordinates.

During the period selected for a round of employee meetings (this period is usually one month), the supervisors lead these meetings. The educational director attends as many employee meetings as possible, and a trained conference critic may assist the director by attending the remainder. These observers take no part in the discussion, but rate each conference in terms of the conference rating scale (Chap. VI). Critical reports in writing are made to each supervisor, and other individual assistance is rendered him. In addition, a part of each rehearsal meeting is given over to general instruction in conference leadership.

Whenever the rehearsed-conference method of employee training has been utilized, it has been found that the average supervisor, without previous training in this field, can become, within a very short time, a fairly good conference leader, particularly when the discussion group is made up of his own subordinates. Some supervisors become exceptionally good conference leaders; on the other hand, one will occasionally be encountered who cannot make the grade in this respect at all. In the latter case, the meetings with this man's subordinates are conducted by one or more of his brother supervisors.

Where this method of training has been employed—in safety training, public relations training, sales training, and in classes in organization and company policy—it has been found to get better results than



are shown when all classes are conducted by staff teachers. It goes without saying that the cost is but a fraction of that of the more conventional methods of training. Supervisors are required to give 2 hours' time each month for attendance at a rehearsal meeting, and from 1½ to 3 hours monthly for conducting their employee meetings, depending on whether the individual supervisor conducts one or two meetings each month.

Thus it may be seen that the rehearsed-conference method requires on the average less than 5 hours of the supervisor's time each month. The supervisor is broadened by this training, and his relationship with his subordinates often is much improved through these conferences. As the on-the-job performance of his subordinates improves, the supervisor's daily work becomes easier. But the greatest advantage to be gained in utilizing the rehearsed-conference method is found in the application of ideas developed in employee conferences in the daily work of the employee. When he has led the discussions with his subordinates, it is easy for the supervisor to check with employees on the job to see to it that these new ideas are put into effect. No one else is in the same position as the supervisor to do this. Thus, employees who have agreed in conference on improved performance in—let us say—accident prevention must put their ideas into practice under their supervisor's direction, and the same rule applies to the employees who are studying other subjects by rehearsed-conference method. When you contrast this situation with that so frequently



encountered when employee training is done by staff instructors, with the supervisors too often opposing the training program either actively or passively, it will be understood that here is another important advantage in the employment of the rehearsed-conference method of instruction.

From the viewpoint of management, there is definite economy in a situation in which the educational director, instead of personally leading relatively few employee meetings, can multiply his efforts by utilizing as many as a hundred or more supervisors (this occurs when the director conducts three or four rehearsal meetings monthly in various divisions of the company), who in turn will lead 150 or more employee meetings each month. A training program so extensive conducted by any other method would require the services of a considerable staff of trained conference leaders in the company's training division, and even then would not get the on-the-job results that are attained through the application of the rehearsed-conference method.

This method of training through supervisors has its principal application only in courses of study that naturally lend themselves to instruction through conference discussion. Likewise, its installation should never be attempted unless the educational director is qualified to train conference leaders. Particularly important is it that the demonstration conference conducted at rehearsal meeting be very nearly a perfect thing, in order that the supervisors will always have before them an excel-

lent model of the meeting they are to conduct with their own subordinates. The conference plans issued to the supervisors are similar to the four-stage plan outlined in Chap. III. The conference critics who attend and criticize the supervisors' meetings with their subordinates are trained along the lines we have indicated in Chap. VI.

Considering the enormous field available in industry for employee training by conference method, it is reasonable to suppose that there will be a sharp increase in the application of this method of instruction in the years ahead. Because of its undoubted superiority as a medium of instruction in these subjects, I would expect to see conference method employed in the future almost exclusively in teaching accident prevention and correct public contact practice in industrial and commercial organizations.

During wartime in our industrial organizations many forms of training and instruction were tried out, some of which proved to be meritorious while others were of lesser worth. In our war industries little effort was made to develop economical methods of employee training. Under normal peacetime conditions, however, there is an increased tendency to scrutinize carefully the cost of any proposed program of employee training before putting it into practice. Therefore, we may now expect industrial management to favor training methods that are most efficient in terms of actual results attained per dollar of expenditure. Under these circumstances

it is reasonable to expect a sharp increase in the application of the conference method of instruction in courses such as safety training, sales training, supervisory training, and public contact training.

## CHAPTER X

### LABOR RELATIONS CONFERENCES

In addition to the business departmental conference and the industrial training conference, a third type of discussion meeting has in recent years assumed importance in commercial and industrial organizations—the labor relations conference. It is logical and natural in these days of social unrest for problems affecting the relationship of employer and employee to be threshed out and solved in conference. Particularly at a time when there has been injected into this relationship many extraneous social and political implications, the labor relations conference often attains a significance that transcends even the undeniable importance of the practical questions relating to wages and working conditions that are worked out in these meetings. Perhaps because of the vital issues to be resolved in such a conference—or in a series of such discussions—the results of poor exhibitions of conference-leadership technique become more painfully evident when the subject for discussion is—let us say—an increase in wages for all the employees of an organization than when the meeting is convened as a routine discussion of departmental production problems.

The important thing to remember when planning any series of labor relations conferences is that these meetings must be conducted exactly like any other good conference. The rules governing the conduct of the leader and of the group in a training conference and the methods employed to develop resultful discussion in a departmental business conference must be observed and practiced in conducting a meeting in which representatives of employer and employees gather about a table to work out problems of vital importance to the organization as a whole. If the reader has had occasion to sit in at many labor relations conferences, he will appreciate what I mean when I say that the trouble with the average meeting of this type is that there is too often a complete lack of adequate conference leadership displayed by the man who occupies the chair.

The labor relations conference, like any other discussion meeting, presupposes a group of people gathered together to solve a series of problems of vital interest to everyone present. This conference should, of course, be conducted by an open-minded and fair-minded individual who favors no clique or faction present at the meeting and who has no ideas of his own to sell to the members of his conference group. Obviously, the entire conference situation deteriorates if a discussion relating to employee wages and working conditions is conducted by a representative of management who can be depended upon to encourage the expression only of those ideas which favor his preconceived views on the subject.

This does not mean, however, that the leader of a labor-management conference should be an individual not in the employ of the company concerned in these negotiations. If the personnel manager of the company in question is qualified as an expert conference leader—as he certainly should be—he should also be qualified to act as a fair and impartial leader of discussion in a labor relations conference. A personnel director, by virtue of his close contact with the personal problems of the individual employee, should be particularly qualified to appreciate the employee's situation with reference to his need for increased wages or improved working conditions. In smaller industrial and commercial organizations I have often observed that the general manager has for many years been taking care of all personnel activity within his company, and, being thus in close touch with the problems of his employees, this individual may prove entirely acceptable to everyone concerned as the leader of a labor relations conference. I have in mind one such general manager who, during the past year, has worked out mutually satisfactory wage scales with representatives of both the CIO and A F of L unions. Sometimes, even in a larger corporation, there will be another executive of almost any rank in the organization whose integrity is so universally accepted that he is the logical choice as a leader of discussion in these labor relations conferences.

It is important that both the labor representatives and the management faction present at any

labor relations conference be in agreement in regard to the selection of the right man to lead these discussions. In each instance the important thing is to select a man who can be depended upon to lead a fair and impartial discussion.

With the leader agreed upon, the next thing in importance at such a meeting as we are discussing is the composition of the conference group itself. In some instances the entire conference situation is disrupted because an opinionated representative of management elects to sit at the head of the table while the conference group consists solely of representatives of a labor organization. This type of labor relations conference makes fair and impartial discussion an impossibility since there is no one present who, by any stretch of the imagination, may be considered unbiased in his opinions. In such a conference the situation often resolves itself into a battle between the leader, on the one hand, and the group on the other. This procedure, of course, creates a situation that is the direct antithesis of that followed in any conference worthy of the name.

A labor relations conference group should consist of several representatives of management and an equal number of employee representatives. Individual management representatives should be selected for their known ability to cooperate, their loyalty to the company employing them, and their fair-mindedness in dealing with their own immediate subordinates. The labor representatives in the conference group should consist of paid officials of the

unions involved in the questions to be determined at these meetings, together with two or more workmen from the plant who may be considered intelligent representatives of their fellows, but who are not paid union officials. The number of management and employee representatives should, of course, be equal, and the conference leader will have no vote in making decisions even though the group vote on any issue happens to result in a tie. In seating the members of his group at such a conference as this, the leader should insist that the representatives of the labor and management factions must not face one another across the board as antagonistic blocs, but must intermingle in the seating arrangements around the conference table.

There are but three situations that can arise in composing the group for a labor relations conference that make it impossible to achieve worth-while results at such a meeting. The first of these is the selection of the wrong man to lead the discussions. The second is the presence at the meeting of a die-hard reactionary representative of management who is firmly convinced that employees should receive only such compensation and gratuities as management, out of its benevolence, sees fit to grant to its subordinates. The third situation is that in which there are union officials present at the meeting who are not working in the best interests of the employees they are paid to represent and who therefore cannot be depended upon to subscribe to a fair and equitable adjustment of any differences that may exist between management and its employees.



When any one of these situations exists, no true conference can be held, since it is impossible to secure any honest meeting of minds on any question brought before the group for discussion. The best that can be hoped for in such a labor relations conference is a long-drawn-out battle at the end of which, through sheer exhaustion, the opposing factions agree, perforce, to some sort of armed truce that by tacit understanding will remain in effect only until such time as one side or the other feels sufficiently strong to resume the fight.

In this discussion, however, we may assume that the representatives both of labor and of management wish to resolve as rapidly as possible any differences that may exist and come to an amicable agreement that will be binding to both parties involved for a stipulated period of time, during which both factions will follow out the spirit as well as the letter of this agreement. In other words, these conferences must be so conducted that they will result in that mutual understanding between labor and management that spells absolute labor peace in that organization for the duration of the agreement drawn up at these meetings.

In planning for such a series of labor relations discussions, the leader should appreciate the fact that there usually exist a number of questions that should be threshed out before the final and more vital discussions as to the exact terms of the labor agreement are begun. Since matters of vital interest to the company as a whole are involved in the decisions to be made in this series of meetings, the

proceedings should not be hurried. A series of three or more meetings should be scheduled, and the earlier discussions should concern themselves with general questions relating to the company's situation in the industrial setup of which it is a part, the reasonable prospects for profitable activity during the years ahead, the general economic situation in the country as it affects the employees' cost of living, and a consideration of the wage structure in comparable organizations or industries. The foregoing is intended only as tentative material; the leader should have little difficulty in determining similar problems that should by all means be discussed in the earlier conferences before any effort is made to draw up a definite agreement on wages and working conditions.


Perhaps the best method of getting the foregoing preliminary information before the conference group is that of requesting individual group members to prepare brief statements on these matters in advance of the meetings, these statements representing in turn the views of management and those of the employee. Then, in the course of the meetings, such a statement may be read aloud by the individual who has prepared it. Following this reading, the meeting is thrown open to a general discussion of the facts presented in the paper, this discussion to be conducted with absolute fairness in regard to all ideas submitted by group members which are actually pertinent to the matter covered in the paper. The reading and discussion of a number of such papers should have the effect of clearing up

many misunderstandings that, if permitted to continue in effect, might make it extremely difficult to arrive at an amicable agreement regarding a new wage schedule. Another objective during the earlier meetings of this short series is that of accustoming the entire group to a fair and intelligent consideration of matters brought before it, so that when consideration is given to wage agreements there can be reasonable expectation of a continuance of this open-minded approach to the problems to be solved.

Preliminary discussions establish the groundwork for the final agreements to be reached in this series of conferences. Only when every member present is well informed regarding the several factors that must be considered before a definite wage scale may be drawn up, can the leader properly introduce for the group's study any proposed wage schedule or other agreement regarding revisions in existing working conditions. During the preliminary study of various factors that will affect this final agreement, it is important that the discussion be led in such a manner that all questions are not decided purely on a basis of whether the group member voting happens to represent management or labor. It will be well to keep the discussion on a basis of what is best for the company as a whole (management and employee alike) rather than on a partisan plane concerning advantages that may accrue to one or another faction within the group. The leader may sense that he is approximating this ideal situation when any votes he may take on questions not involving definite commitments regarding mat-

ters pertaining to employee wages or working conditions result in certain representatives of management voting along with certain representatives of labor. Anything that breaks down the sense of two opposing factions engaged in a battle for supremacy will aid in securing amicable agreement in the final conferences of the series on those problems necessitating the convening of labor relations conferences.

After an amicable relationship has been established among the various members of the group, and these representatives have become accustomed to discussing questions that are of interest to Americans generally, the leader will feel justified in asking representatives of labor and of management to prepare and present to the group two comprehensive plans in which proposed wage schedules and improvements in working conditions are enumerated. These statements should be read to the group by their sponsors, preferably at the opening of the meeting preceding the final session of the series of conferences. Copies of these brochures should be placed in the hands of each group member before any discussion whatever is permitted on either statement. The leader should insist that each statement be made short, be confined solely to definite proposals, and embody no confusing extraneous material in the way of justification for the data contained in the proposals. Thus, the facts of the proposed agreements are quickly set forth, and the arguments for and against the various items of the schedules are brought out orally in the discussion that follows the presentation of these proposals.



I believe the day is not far distant when the various items contained in the two proposals just referred to will be nearly identical in a majority of labor-management conferences throughout this country. When that time comes we shall see less of the insincerity embodied in such tentative propositions than is now the case. Many times now management may offer less in the way of wages and improved working conditions than it is prepared to concede eventually, while labor representatives demand much more in these respects than they actually expect to receive. The sooner these proposals of labor and management approximate agreement, the better it will be for all of us—workingman, management, and the public at large.

Once the proposals have been placed before the conference group for consideration, the leader should open the discussion by calling attention to a single item embodied in both proposals and asking for discussion on this matter. If, from his intimate acquaintanceship with the situation existing within his own organization, the leader is in a position to select, at first, those items on which there is likely to be a minimum of disagreement, it may be well to dispose of these matters at the outset. This is done, of course, by encouraging a brief discussion on each noncontroversial item, securing a suggestion for a compromise statement, putting this suggestion to a vote, and clearing up the matter in question once and for all. Such action has the effect of impressing on the group members the fact that they are there solely for the purpose of working out to-

gether, as rapidly as possible, further compromises on the more serious questions they are about to consider. Once a group gets the feeling that it is accomplishing something worth while, it is possible for the leader to expedite the remaining work of the conferences and insist upon a continuation of such efficient transaction of business. Conversely, if a group is permitted to deadlock on minor questions, it will become increasingly difficult to get this group to agree on any subject at all. More often than not this unfortunate situation is brought about through the conference-leadership technique exhibited by the man at the head of the table. If a group is properly handled from the beginning, its members become more and more cooperative with each succeeding conference.

The real climax of interest in this series of discussions will occur when questions relating to such clauses of the agreement as maintenance of membership, closed shop, and actual wage schedules are brought up for consideration. Obviously, these matters will constitute the basis for discussion in the closing conferences of the series. If the group is made up of fair-minded, intelligent individuals, who feel that they are there to outline an agreement that will insure a lasting labor peace in that industrial organization, the work of the leader is made much easier. With such a group, the management contingent will protect the interests of the stockholders while also standing ready to make whatever concessions are necessary to ensure that the plant will have a satisfied working force throughout the

ensuing year. The representatives of labor, on the other hand, will jealously guard the rights of their membership but will nevertheless make every effort to cooperate with management *for the good of the company as a whole*.

Perhaps the criterion of any good labor relations conference is the degree to which both factions present are willing to make concessions for the good of the company, as distinguished from the good of the stockholders or the good of the organized employees. In such a series of conferences there must be discussions of the effect of discordant labor relations within any industrial organization on the attitude of the public toward that organization and, therefore, on the ability of that company to get its share of business in the highly competitive peacetime market that always follows the semisocialized production methods by which munitions of war are manufactured.

Both the representatives of management and those who speak for labor at these conferences are sufficiently farsighted to understand that no organization can prosper when there is a lack of confidence between management and employee. During the past year I have sat in at a number of conferences of this type, and in each instance, almost from the beginning, it was possible to forecast the success that would attend the leader's efforts to bring about a satisfactory solution to the problems facing the members of these groups. Shortly after the opening of the first conference it became evident that the meeting in that particular company would



develop in one of two ways. Either the leader would in every case make the good of the company as a whole the criterion of the success or failure of each solution discussed, or the meeting would shortly degenerate into a dogfight in which opposing factions would selfishly strive by every means at their command to defeat each other's interests. In the latter instances no real good ever came out of these conferences.

If the leader of a series of labor relations conferences has been chosen for his impartiality and acknowledged sense of fairness, he should then be permitted to rebuke members of either faction attending these meetings who may indulge in personalities or otherwise display obstructionist tactics that may make it difficult for the thoughtful members present to achieve a careful study of the problem under discussion. The leader should either control the conference situation at all times or step aside in favor of someone who has the ability to command the respect of both factions present at the meeting.

It is unfortunate that there should be ill-natured dissension between the representatives of management and labor at certain of the conferences. Already in many industries these representatives are learning to confer on such problems in a commendable spirit of cooperation. Undoubtedly, just as soon as labor and management generally come to appreciate that their interests are in every sense truly identical, it will come to pass that the labor relations conference will evolve, not into a battle for factional supremacy, but into a meeting in



which, through amicable but thoughtful discussion, agreements will be reached that will be to the best interests of everyone concerned.

In the meantime, in those instances in which there are bitter differences to be resolved and mediated, there is no better method of dissipating ill feeling than to permit disgruntled representatives of either management or labor to get their grievances off their respective chests while indulging in a red-hot conference discussion. Properly controlled and directed, such a conference can eventually result in great good, since once these irascible individuals have finished blowing off steam they are usually ready to get down to business and develop workable agreements. The leader's job here is to see to it that no irreparable damage to anyone's feelings is done during these displays of pyrotechnics.

Anyone who has confidence in the essential rightness of the democratic way of life must believe that each year we will see fewer autocratic representatives of management and fewer shortsighted labor representatives seated about the conference table when employer-employee agreements are being worked out. Unquestionably, any improvement in the type of personnel attending these labor relations conferences will make the work of the leaders of such discussions that much easier, and the results attained by these conferences that much more acceptable to the employer, the employee, and the public at large.

## CHAPTER XI

### FURTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

So far in these pages we have discussed the most common present-day applications of the developmental conference: the departmental business conference, employee training by conference method, the selling conference, the labor relations conference, and variations of all these. Now let us give some consideration to other applications of the conference with which we have had less experience, but which promise to become important future fields for instruction or for idea development by conference method.

I have said that the tendency in all legislative, club, and business committee meetings is away from formal parliamentary procedure and in the direction of the more resultful openly conducted discussion. It is reasonable to assume that Americans will continue this trend away from involved procedure and toward the natural simplicity of the conference. This, then, will be one of the principal developments in the application of conference technique in the near future. Less and less will committees concern themselves with the burdensome formalities of parliamentary processes. More and more will the chairman of these groups seat the members about a table

and at once open a general discussion of the problems confronting the committee.

A committee meeting can be planned and conducted exactly like any other conference. Whether the first problem to appear before the group is one concerning legislation of world-shaking importance, or whether the problem is the disposal of tickets for the club's annual play, it can be worded as a discussion question (probably as an alternative question), and so presented to the group. Discussion can then be directed so as to attain the object either of developing the greatest number of new ideas on the subject, or of securing a group consensus acceptable to the chairman of the meeting. Usually, of course, the former objective will be that sought by the leader.

Committee members enjoy being relieved from the restrictions of formal debate. When everyone present can participate in the discussion without the necessity of obtaining recognition from the chair, discussion is immensely speeded up. Thus, more real thought may be developed on a subject in an open conference of an hour's duration than in a parliamentary meeting of three times that length.

With good leadership not only will a committee quickly come to agreement on a question, but the majority of the group at the same time will sell themselves on the correctness of their decision, and on the further necessity for speedy, definite action with which to implement this decision.

Much good will one day come of nation-wide series of conferences in which the groups are made

up of local school teachers and the parents of their pupils. In these meetings many of the problems confronting both parents and teachers will be ironed out much more quickly, smoothly, and effectively than is possible by any means now employed for this purpose. The questions to be discussed in these conferences would readily suggest themselves on the basis of what problems in parent-teacher relationships are creating the most concern in any given community. Properly conducted, one such meeting would dispose for a long time of a number of vexatious problems now causing deep concern to everyone responsible for our system of public instruction.

It is reasonable to assume that further employment of the conference method of instruction will be made also in our schools and colleges—limited, of course, by considerations of applicability in each instance. Particularly in the colleges there will be found opportunities for further substituting the conference for the lecture, with the corresponding increased incentive to clear, independent thinking on the part of the students. Progress in this direction will be slow, since it requires time to change any long-established custom, and the lecture method of teaching has existed since the beginning of time. At best, of course, but relatively few school and college subjects ever can be taught effectively by conference method, owing principally to the requirement that the members of a conference group possess some previous knowledge of the subject that

is being taught. This ordinarily is not the case among public school students.

There is, however, one field in which the conference has had little real application, yet in which one day it will be found to be the supreme answer to a great problem in human behavior. In the field of religious education the conference must eventually supersede every other form of teaching. This is true because in this case the subject to be taught is one with which every student concerned has had previous personal experience. The need here is for conferences in which problems of moral conduct and spiritual experience may be freely discussed in classes comprised of persons of every age group above—let us say—that of ten years. At about this age every normal individual has acquired experience that makes it possible for him or her to participate intelligently in discussions of this nature.

In these pages it is not the intention to indulge in controversial discussion concerning religious education. It should be enough to point out the possibilities for the application of conference method to spiritual training in any form and to let those interested make whatever use of this information they see fit. Such procedure as is here recommended, and the discussion questions suggested later in this chapter, are submitted as but tentative material.

My hesitancy to outline definite procedure for conference instruction in religious subjects is based on an experience of mine, on an occasion when I was invited to demonstrate the conference method to a group of Sunday-school teachers in one of the

largest churches in Chicago. The demonstration conference was in itself successful enough, and at its close the assembled teachers expressed themselves as eager to apply this method in teaching their Sunday-school classes. But the idea was firmly vetoed by the pastor of the church, who apparently did not care to see any such innovation enter into the instruction of his Sunday-school flock. However, since that time, I understand, many teachers in that Sunday school are employing conference method in teaching their charges.

Considering it purely as a problem in education, there is no slightest reason why conference method should not be employed exclusively in religious training. Given any group of 20 people or so, and there will be found in this company an enormous amount of personal experience on which the leader may draw for discussion. I know of no other subject for discussion that equals this in universal application to all kinds and types of people. From the moment the first discussion question was propounded in such a conference, there would be the most intense interest manifested by the entire group. In matters of human conduct one person's opinion may be worth just as much as another's, and everyone present would endeavor to participate as often as possible. Not only would the amount of participation thus rate high, but because of the universality of religious experience, the quality of such response also would be of the highest.

As one example of a discussion question of this type, I should like to quote the problem I used in

the afore-mentioned conference of Sunday-school teachers in the Chicago church. The question was designed to interest that particular group, but it should be of equal interest to all parents, teachers, and religious educators. It reads, "Considering the three to total 100 points, what is the division of responsibility as between the parent, the church, and the public school for the moral development of the child?" The discussion of this question lasted for more than an hour and was of absorbing interest to the leader. At the finish it resolved itself into a two-way battle between the representatives of the public schools present and the church folk, each faction attempting to prove that the *other* should shoulder the major share of this responsibility. Apparently no one present considered the parent as having much responsibility in the matter at all, or much opportunity to discharge such responsibility as he might possess. I do not remember the exact score of the final vote, but it was something like parents, 10; church, 40; public schools, 50. No doubt you will not agree with this division of responsibility, but the point of such a discussion is not the accuracy of the final decision, but the amount of thoughtful effort given by the group to the discussion of the problem. In this case, I can assure you, a very considerable amount of careful thought was given to the question by these Sunday-school teachers before the final vote was taken.

When the conference method of teaching has been fully applied in religious education, nearly all Sunday-school and Bible classes, and all young people's



meetings and midweek prayer services, will be conducted as open discussion meetings. This means that there will be a minimum of lecture by the leader, and no question-and-answer period near the close of the meeting—which is just another form of lecture presentation. Religious education will then become intensely interesting. Sunday discussions of thought-provoking problems of human behavior—discussions properly conducted by trained conference leaders—will have great carry-over effect throughout the week.

It will be necessary that all Sunday-school teachers be given some training as conference leaders in order that they may understand the fundamentals of directing discussion to a useful conclusion. It might be well for the director of religious education to institute something approximating the rehearsed-conference method of training, as outlined in Chap. IX. In this case, the Sunday-school teachers would meet with the director during the week for the regular rehearsal meeting, where they would participate in the same discussion that they would be leading individually on the following Sunday. After the meeting they would be furnished with detailed plans for leading this conference with their class groups.

Any standard Sunday-school lesson plan will lend itself to conversion to conference discussion. In each of these there is usually a basis on which to build a number of really thought-provoking discussion questions. (In the period of time available for the Sunday-school conference, it would be better to discuss but one or two questions rather than



to rush superficially through the discussion of several questions.) There is no problem in morality or in spiritual values that cannot be expressed in the form of a concrete discussion question.

When a Sunday-school class becomes a place in which any problem in human conduct may be freely discussed, it at once assumes a very important position in the life of any community. Questions of far-reaching import may be threshed out in these gatherings. There is really no limit to the subject matter available for discussion in such meetings.

*Am I my brother's keeper?* Here is material for a hundred discussion questions, all of them practical, concrete problems in which a complete case is stated. Final agreement on such a problem could come only after exhaustive discussion, and participation in that discussion would develop carry-over to the lives of the group members beyond anything that has ever been achieved by other means.

*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* In the years ahead of us governments (and therefore individuals) must decide this question in dead earnest. It is one that citizens should discuss with a view to determining the degree of punishment, of retribution, that should be meted out in peace settlements. As in the case of the first-mentioned problem, so with this one; a hundred discussion questions can be written around it and about the converse text, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*. Each of these will be hard, practical, concrete cases, in the discussion of which realistic decisions would be reached.

As in employee training we ask the members of

discussion groups to abide by the majority decisions arrived at in conference, so it should be feasible to ask the members of a religious instruction group to abide by, and put into practice, the decisions reached in group discussion. If this were done, carry-over to the individual's habits of thought and action could be secured in the highest degree.

*Children, obey your parents.* Here again we have excellent material for the most practical, worthwhile discussion of common behavior problems. Shall children invariably obey their parents; if not, when shall they obey and when shall they not obey? Is it better, in case of disobedience, to conceal this from parents? What particular training have parents received that enables them to give orders intelligently to their offspring? What effect would it have on the progress of the world if parents always received implicit obedience from their children? Discussed honestly and fairly, purely as problems of behavior, with no effort made by the leader to influence a decision, such discussion questions could be extremely thought provoking. On the other hand, if by wording or inflection the discussion topics were presented as leading questions, with a desired response indicated in one way or another, they would not be worth a nickel in training the knowing youth of today.

It so happens that many of the business executives whom I have trained as conference leaders have been active also in Sunday-school and Bible-class leadership. As these men and women have mastered the conference technique, they have natu-

rally applied it in conducting their religious classes, as well as in leading conferences at the office. The experiences of these people in leading open discussions on problems of the sort I have just indicated have interested me greatly. Invariably they report that the groups were at first befuddled at the sudden transition from lecture to pure conference, but that this condition lasted through only a portion of one meeting. After this early confusion, the leaders unanimously reported, there was a great increase in group interest, accompanied usually by a corresponding increase in percentage attendance on the part of the group members. It is easy to believe that any such class would be confused at being suddenly metamorphosed from a passive audience into an active discussion group. The increased attendance also seems reasonable, since anyone would naturally prefer participating in an open discussion meeting to listening to the ideas of one man or woman on questions that play so important a part in the lives of everyone in the group. It is also readily understandable that the executives in question expressed the opinion that, for the first time, they thoroughly enjoyed their work as Sunday-school or Bible-class teachers.

I have previously stated that a poor conference is of little value; that it is less worth while to everyone concerned than is a mediocre lecture. This fact must be kept in mind when consideration is being given to the matter of changing teaching methods in Sunday-school classes. It sometimes happens that when those in authority decide to use confer-

ence method for religious education, they view with some alarm the wide-open discussion, and attempt to substitute for it a half-conference, half-lecture mélange, which has little to recommend it from either viewpoint. The only thing accomplished by such halfway measures is the complete discountenancing of the conference as a method of instruction. There is only one type of conference that is any good at all and that is the 100 per cent conference, in which free and open discussion is encouraged from beginning to end. A little discussion sprinkled throughout a meeting is of no benefit to anyone, and a question-and-answer symposium at the conclusion of a meeting has no conference value whatever. Either free and open discussion should be permitted, or the old-style lecture should be retained.

Free and open discussion does not mean loose and aimless discussion. Trained conference leaders always have clearly in mind the aim of a conference, even though they may make no effort to guide the discussion to a predetermined conclusion. In conferences of the type we are now considering, no such effort would be made, since the highest degree of good would follow open discussion leading to group consensus, regardless of what this consensus happened to be. This is the feature of free and open discussion that so distresses those who would have everyone abide by rules of conduct not of their own devising. To those who understand the conference method of instruction, it is of small moment what conclusion a given group arrives at after discussion of any problem. The important thing is that the

group members have an opportunity thoroughly to study the question and decide for themselves what conclusion they wish to reach concerning the problem involved. It is this feature of religious education by conference method that appeals so strongly to all types of group members. Anyone who has faith in democracy must have confidence that only good can result from such consensus, openly arrived at.

Conference method of instruction can be instituted in Sunday schools and Bible classes in either of two ways. In one case, the director of religious education conducts a series of classes in the technique of conference leadership, with all Sunday-school teachers in attendance. In these classes each teacher is given an opportunity to lead a practice conference, with the remainder of the class acting as the group. The teachers are taught methods of meeting common conference situations and of controlling discussion under diverse conditions. They learn how to interpret a conference plan, and how to lead resultful conferences when furnished with such a plan. When this course of instruction is completed, it will be necessary only for the director to prepare each week a conference plan (see Chap. III) containing a few really thought-provoking discussion questions covering the material for the day's lesson. With this plan before him any trained conference leader could lead a resultful conference with his group.

The other method is that which I mentioned previously, and which is outlined in detail in Chap.

IX—the rehearsed-conference method of training. In this instance, instead of conducting a formal course of training in conference leadership, the director meets weekly with the teachers in a rehearsal meeting. A single preliminary meeting is followed by a series of rehearsed conferences, attended by all teachers and led by the director. In these rehearsal meetings the material for the following Sunday's conferences is discussed by the assembled teachers in exactly the same way that the students will discuss it on Sunday. Conference plans are issued that vary somewhat in content for classes in different age groups. In groups below a predetermined age—perhaps ten—no conference would be held, instruction continuing by the methods at present in effect.

I have given some space to a discussion of the possibilities of applying conference method to religious education because I believe this field may see some of the most important developments in instruction by conference method during the years immediately ahead. When religious education generally is carried on through free and open discussion, there will occur an increase in interest, in attendance, and in carry-over from the conference to the workaday activities of life, surpassing anything we have ever experienced in the past.

Aside from those newer applications of the conference that we have here discussed, there will no doubt develop further important fields in which conference technique may be profitably applied. For the most part it will be found that the fields in ques-

tion are today being served by oratory. Some day we may even choose our public officials in sober fashion, through conferences, rather than on the present unthinking basis of listening to an orator's appeal to our hates and prejudices.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FINER POINTS OF CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP

In Chap. II, and generally throughout these pages, I have attempted to set forth a workable technique in conference leadership. For the average discussion meeting the information given is sufficient to enable the leader to turn in a resultful, and on occasion perhaps even an inspirational, conference.

Ordinarily it may be assumed in any conference that the group and the leader are equally interested in solving a problem of common concern to all those present. When this is true it is necessary only for the leader to employ fair leadership technique, and the conference will be successful.

In unusual instances, however, a conference leader may be called on to overcome unusual obstacles. It may be that his group is not in sympathy with his aims in the conference. Or previous experience of the group members with unskilled conference leadership may have prejudiced them against all conferences on general principles. Or the group members are already antagonistic toward one another, or the leader finds it necessary to accomplish far more in one conference than should be required of him, or emergency situations arise in a conference which, until then, has been progressing smoothly.



At times such as these the expert conference leader must have something in reserve, a few tricks of the trade on which he may draw to overcome exceptional difficulties or circumstances. In these final pages, I should like to discuss some of the finer points of conference leadership. Somewhere among these suggestions the conference leader may find the idea or method he needs to improve his leadership.

*Teaching Groups to Confer:* As a first suggestion I would emphasize the fact that *conference groups oftentimes must be taught to confer*. This fact appears to escape the attention of many conference leaders. It is utterly wrong to follow the assumption that because free and open discussion is a natural thing in a democracy, all citizens of a democracy are inherently qualified to confer intelligently together. Perhaps they would be so qualified if they had not been exposed for so many years to oratory, and, therefore, been forced to develop the qualifications of listener rather than those of participant.

Left to their own devices many members of a conference group will talk too much and think too little. Other members will not talk at all. Still others will indulge in private conversations. And so it goes. All these things, and many others that may occur in a conference, react against the success of the meeting.

Much of this disorder may be removed for all time in a series of conferences if proper action is taken in the opening conference of the series. During the first 10 minutes of that first meeting, the

leader should issue to each member of his group, either orally or typed on slips of paper, the brief Conference Rules of Order. These have been worded in various ways for various group types, but their sense is contained in the following, which is the list as it is usually issued at an employee training conference.

#### CONFERENCE RULES OF ORDER

1. The leader has no ideas to present to the group. All decisions will represent the consensus of the group.

2. Everyone is expected to participate in the discussion freely and voluntarily, but no one will be called on for an opinion.

3. Talk one at a time. Please refrain from private conversations, out of courtesy to the man who has the floor.

4. Express your opinions briefly.

5. We expect a difference of opinion, but no one should get angry if others differ with his opinions.

These rules, enforced, will go far toward converting a disorderly group into an orderly one, in which there is evident a minimum of wasted effort on the part of everyone present. It is only necessary to call a group member's attention to an infraction of the conference rules, should he talk too much, indulge in private conversations with his neighbors, or otherwise conduct himself in a manner calculated to obstruct the proceedings.

The point is that most such transgressions are entirely innocent in intent and will be avoided as soon as the group becomes aware of the injurious effect of these actions on the conference. If the leader attempts merely to ignore such infractions as they occur, the group will not learn how to confer properly, even though its members meet together dozens of times. It is up to the leader to teach the members of his group how to conduct themselves in conference. The Rules of Order will help in this. After the third meeting of a series it seldom should be necessary to refer to these rules in conference.

*The Center of Gravity in a Conference:* The leader of a conference must learn to subordinate his own ego for the good of the conference. He must become thoroughly sold on the credo that the center of gravity in any conference is in the group, not in the leader. Most conference leaders subscribe to this theory, but too many of them fail to practice it. Particularly if the leader has had much experience as a public speaker, it seems to him utterly pointless to sit there at the head of the table, with a fine audience before him, and simply keep his mouth shut. Especially is this true when he feels that he could set the group members right on everything and solve all their problems for them just by uttering a few words.

If the leader cannot control this desire to be "it," he probably never will discover what he has missed by attempting to be the whole show. It is not until the leader puts the entire weight of the conference on the group's shoulders and says, in effect,

"If you people don't talk, and won't make an effort to solve this problem, we will sit here in a Quaker meeting for the next 2 hours," that he becomes aware of the enormous force generated when 20 brains tackle a common problem. The too-talkative, too-assertive conference leader never has a chance to find out these things for himself.

*The Leader Must Relax:* This may sound trite, but it is a fact that the conference leader must learn to relax. He must not hurry matters. He must remember that, though he may have heard a particular question discussed many, many times, the group before him is discussing it for the first time. He must have faith that in a properly conducted conference, this group, like the others, will get to the heart of the subject in a reasonable length of time and without much goading from him. The conference leader who never has sat for 15 minutes in a conference without once opening his mouth, and without the necessity arising for his saying anything, has missed an inspiring experience. In order that the leader may withdraw from the discussion to this extent, yet have the conference proceed satisfactorily during that whole period, it is necessary that the discussion question be interesting, and that the conference group be one that is well trained. It is here, indeed, that the work of the leader in training this group to confer intelligently is showing results. The nervous or self-assertive conference leader never could keep quiet for as long as 15 minutes, even though the meeting were proceeding perfectly.

If the leader persists in talking too much, this probably is due to his dread of losing control of the conference situation. He fears that the group members will ignore his presence entirely, if he fails from time to time to remind them he is there. If the leader knows his business, this fear is groundless. It is only necessary that a well-trained group sense the presence of their leader at the head of the table; then its members will continue their attack on the problem without continuous prodding on his part. The conference leader's infrequent contributions in the form of questions then receive most careful consideration from the group, and the members soon come to realize that any word from the leader is worth listening to. The wordy conference leader never quite achieves this goal.

Earlier in these pages we emphasized that the leader must develop a real interest in the discussion in progress in his group. No matter how many times he has listened to the same discussion, this interest must be maintained. For me this matter has never presented any difficulties, since the attack of each group on any problem always is a bit different from that of any other group, and I am completely absorbed in observing the manner in which a particular group will solve its problem.

*Selecting the Right Follow-up Question:* Keen interest on the part of the leader is not merely a desirable condition; it is an absolute necessity if his follow-up questions are to fit aptly into the discussion. The leader might conceivably be able to conceal from the group his lack of interest in the

discussion, but the first time he employed a follow-up question that failed to synchronize with that discussion there would be a sense of shock in the group, caused by the realization of the members that their leader was not following their thought as closely as he should. I have even observed instances in which a group would politely suggest to the leader that he pay a little more attention to the discussion and not ask questions that were ill-timed or otherwise out of order.

The frequent use by the leader of the follow-up question "Why?" appears to have a stimulating effect on almost any discussion. A group member makes a flat statement of opinion without offering any proof or reasons for holding that opinion. As often as not, he is willing to let the matter rest there. But the leader's "Why, Mr. ——?" forces the member to dig down and bring up real reasons with which to bolster his opinion, reasons that will stand up before the attack of a strong opposition. Many a time in observing a new conference leader in action, I am tempted to insert a number of "Whys?" into the discussion myself, knowing well that these queries would make all the difference between the rather dull meeting then under way and a real conference.

As I have mentioned before, much of the ability of a conference leader to employ the one correct follow-up question at exactly the correct fifth-part-of-a-second depends on his knack for sensing instantly the obvious. Always it is there—the one perfect question indicated, the use of which will

convert a sedate discussion into a red-hot debate. Always it is extremely thought provoking. The member may have stated a course of action that he would pursue under certain circumstances, and at exactly the right instant comes the question from the leader, "And if that does not work, Mr. ——?" If, however, in the estimation of the leader the speaker has done enough talking for a while, the question is put to the group as a whole, "Will that work?"

Make your follow-up questions short and pithy. Avoid pomposity—the "phony" dignity that results in a conference leader's killing discussion while he phrases and delivers a seemingly momentous follow-up question. Follow-up questions must slip into the discussion so smoothly that the group is not aware of its thought's being directed. To this end the leader must learn to compress much meaning into few words. With many group types a great help in achieving this is the adoption by the leader of the argot in common, everyday use among the group members themselves. A slang word may carry a complete idea to such a group, the expression of which might otherwise call for the delivery of a full sentence. The use of slang on certain occasions is to be recommended. The use of profanity by the leader, with the idea of making himself "one of the boys," is entirely out of order, not because of the profanity itself necessarily, but because of the encouragement this may give to some of the group members to substitute stupid profanity for reasonable discussion.



*Employing the Pickup:* An aid in making follow-up questions most effective is the device known as the "pickup." Briefly, this consists of the leader's memorizing certain responses of group members in one part of a meeting and making reference to these responses in another part of that meeting. The pickup is most frequently used when a member's contribution is not especially important to the success of the discussion at the moment it is uttered, but would be of importance at a later point in the meeting if it had only been made then. The member probably will not repeat his statement at this more timely instant, but the leader may interrupt discussion long enough to say, "A while ago Mr. — brought out this idea," and go on to repeat the member's previous response.

The pickup has a number of points that recommend its occasional use. In the first place, it is a very fine form of credit to the member who originally made the contribution, the assumption being that his remarks were considered so valuable by the leader as to warrant his memorizing them and later reintroducing them into the discussion. Then, by placing this response once more before the group, the leader may create intense discussion, particularly if the response opposes in thought a contribution just made by another group member. Or the pickup may be used when, for some reason, a conference that was going well earlier has bogged down, with responses becoming less frequent. Further, the leader may wish to employ this device, on occasion, in order to direct the discussion toward a given



conclusion. In this latter case, the pickup would be used because no response from the group was forthcoming at that time on which the leader could build a follow-up question having the desired directional twist.

*Giving Directional Impetus to Follow-up Questions:* The matter of giving follow-up questions a proper directional twist has been mentioned before, but a word more on the subject may not be amiss. It should be emphasized that the leader should make use of this practice only occasionally with any particular group, since too frequent application of it will tend to create resentment on the part of the group members. At times, however, it is an invaluable aid in directing discussion toward a useful conclusion.

Let us assume that you have put to the group the question you wish discussed. You intend to direct the discussion of this question toward a predetermined conclusion. At once you get a response, then another, and another and another. As each response is given, you merely acknowledge it, perhaps only by a nod of the head. Let us say, however, that response 2 comes closest to expressing the general line of thought you wish the group to follow from there on. You do not seize on this response as soon as it is uttered. You wait until responses 3 and 4 have appeared. Then you insert your follow-up question, and this refers only to the idea conveyed in response 2.

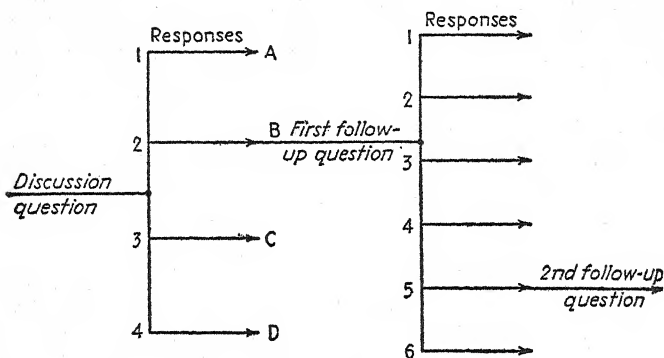
Discussion is then pursued along this line, with several more responses forthcoming. Then the proc-

ess is repeated, with the second follow-up question calling the attention of the group to but one of these responses—the one that further develops the idea you have in mind. Unless the group is antagonistic or unless certain group members dislike having their ideas ignored and insist upon reintroducing them into the discussion, the conference must inevitably move along toward the agreement desired by the leader. If the group is really antagonistic, the leader will, of course, adopt the negative method of leading. If individual group members show a tendency to fight for their ideas, they can make the leader's work more difficult, but they cannot affect the result of the conference as long as the leader retains control of the discussion. In practice, there is usually little difficulty experienced in securing amicably the agreement desired.

In the normal conference the leader is not attempting to sell his ideas to the group. Therefore, each response made to his questions will be given equal encouragement for further development, unless the leader, from much previous experience with group explorations into a certain idea, knows that discussion of it is valueless and will only waste a considerable amount of time. Then he may ignore it.

*The Diagram of Directed Discussion:* In the diagram on page 194 I have illustrated the method just described by which discussion may be directed to a predetermined conclusion. In this figure, the second response to the discussion question happens to embody the idea that it is desirable to have de-

veloped further. Therefore, *after* responses 3 and 4 have been made and acknowledged, the first follow-up question is inserted by the leader, and this question refers, of course, to response 2. This follow-up question then develops six responses, of which only response 5 further develops the train



Method of directing discussion to a desired conclusion.

of thought that the leader wishes the group to follow. Therefore, after response 6 has been acknowledged, the second follow-up question will be inserted into the discussion, and this question will, of course, refer to the sentiment expressed in response 5.

Now, on the other hand, if it were desired to lead this meeting strictly as a developmental conference, the procedure would be as follows: After the first four responses were received, the leader would ask a follow-up question, at point A, to encourage the group to explore further the idea expressed in response 1. When this discussion was completed, he

would ask another follow-up question, at point *B*, to promote discussion of the ideas embodied in response 2. This procedure would continue, at points *C* and *D*, for responses 3 and 4, after which the leader would determine which phases of the entire discussion up to that point were most deserving of further exploration by the group. It should be understood that other follow-up questions than those indicated may be interspersed throughout the discussion as the necessity for their use arises. Those follow-up questions depicted in the diagram are the ones to be employed to impart *direction* to the discussion. At other points in the conference, the use of additional follow-up questions may, and probably will, be required.

*The Transfer:* When a conference leader is leading a number of conferences with two or more groups (particularly when these are training conferences and the groups are made up of employees of the same company), it is sometimes practicable to "transfer" ideas from one group to another. This is a perfectly legitimate procedure if it is properly done, even though it necessitates the leader's dropping for the moment his role of questioner only. In the midst of a discussion it becomes apparent that a group is going to overlook an important idea that was brought out in a discussion of the same problem by one or more of the other groups covering this same discussion material. The leader then says, "In such-and-such a group an idea was brought out, in connection with this question, that has not been mentioned here. Let me tell you what it was,

and then you tell me what you think of it." Following this explanation, the leader states the idea in question and thus inserts it into the discussion. This device, if it is employed sparingly, is one of which good use can be made. In exceptional instances, the leader may even resort to it to introduce into the discussion ideas of his own, which he will credit to the members of other groups.

*The Climax of Interest:* There is, or should be, a rhythm in individual conferences and in series of conferences, as well. In each conference the discussion questions should be so planned that together they form a progressive entity. Near the close of each conference, and near the close of a series of conferences, the interest in the meeting or in the series of meetings must crescendo to a maximum intensity. The purpose of this should be evident. You want your group members to finish each conference with their interest keyed to a very high pitch, so that they will leave the room highly motivated. When this occurs, carry-over from that conference will be exceptionally strong. In the same way, a very high degree of interest attained near the close of a series of conferences will leave your group in a proper frame of mind to welcome any future announcement that they are to meet with you again, for yet another series of conferences. If the sequence of discussion questions in the conference plan is carefully worked out, maximum interest can be timed to occur in the discussion of the final or the next-to-last question. Likewise, by proper arrangement of the subjects for a series of

conferences, it is possible to secure maximum interest in either the final or the next-to-final conference of the series.

In dealing with employee training groups, there is an advantage in having this climax occur in the next-to-final meeting. Usually it is advisable to reserve all or most of the last conference of a series for unusual discussions, in which the group is given a sense of holiday as a reward for having worked hard and well during the preceding dozen or more conferences. Such a let-down is particularly important in the case of employee groups, because rarely are there issued to these people any certificates or other form of recognition of achievement (except in the pay envelope) for completing courses of this type. In conference leadership training groups, for example, I like to devote a part of the last evening to leading a demonstration conference myself, with the class rating critically my ability to handle difficult situations, which the members purposely create. Since the group members have suffered individually from this kind of criticism throughout the course, they very much appreciate such an opportunity to "gang up" on their instructor. The conference is invariably a hilarious one, yet it has much excellent instructional value, too. Its primary purpose, however, is to leave the group with a feeling of having gained something by completing their course of training.

*Humor in Follow-up Questions:* Occasionally it is possible to give a follow-up question a humorous twist, which will draw a short but hearty laugh from

the group without, however, breaking the continuity of thought in the discussion. When this can be done in such a way that the humor in question is not aimed unpleasantly at any individuals in the group, the effect is very desirable. In addition to lightening the gravity of the conference situation and thereby relaxing tension, which may have become unduly prolonged, such an occasional flash of humor appears to have the further effect of drawing the very closest attention on the part of every group member to every question of the leader. This is probably due, in the main, to the group's desire not to miss an opportunity for a good laugh occasionally—the same psychology that makes us listen closely to every word of our favorite radio comedian, lest we miss the point of a joke. Conference jokes should be infrequent, but they should appear from time to time, even when the subject matter under discussion is of a most serious nature.

*How Shall You Address Group Members?* The form of address to be chosen by the conference leader when speaking to an individual group member is a matter on which good conference leaders differ. Some leaders like to get down to a "Bill" and "Mary" footing as quickly as possible, feeling that this touch of familiarity produces a more informal situation and therefore one in which there are evident less friction and better cooperation. When the leader finds that the use of familiar forms of salutation, even of nicknames, facilitates discussion, he should stick to this method of addressing individuals in his groups.



For myself, however, I have found the opposite situation much more advantageous from every viewpoint. I prefix Mr., Mrs., or Miss to the name of every member of my groups, no matter on what friendly terms I may be with these people outside the conference. I believe that they all appreciate and enjoy this consideration. For many of them it is almost the only occasion on which they are addressed in such formal fashion. Furthermore, I consider that it adds something to a meeting if there is just a touch of formality in the proceedings. Since all parliamentary procedure has been removed from the streamlined conference, it does no harm if a little dignity is added to the situation, if only to keep the conference from becoming altogether too informal in nature. When discussion becomes hot and furious, the distinction then is between the conference that resembles a refereed boxing match and the other type that reminds one of a free-for-all barroom brawl. Like the boxing match, a good conference should have plenty of action, but its power should be subject to control. In my experience, formal salutation of all group members helps toward maintaining a conference atmosphere in which this objective may be attained.

*Size of Groups:* How large should a conference group be? Well, the smallest group with which I ever conducted a regular series of training conferences was made up of four men. The largest group I have met with in an extended series of meetings was made up of 45 foremen. On several rather unusual occasions, I have conducted something ap-

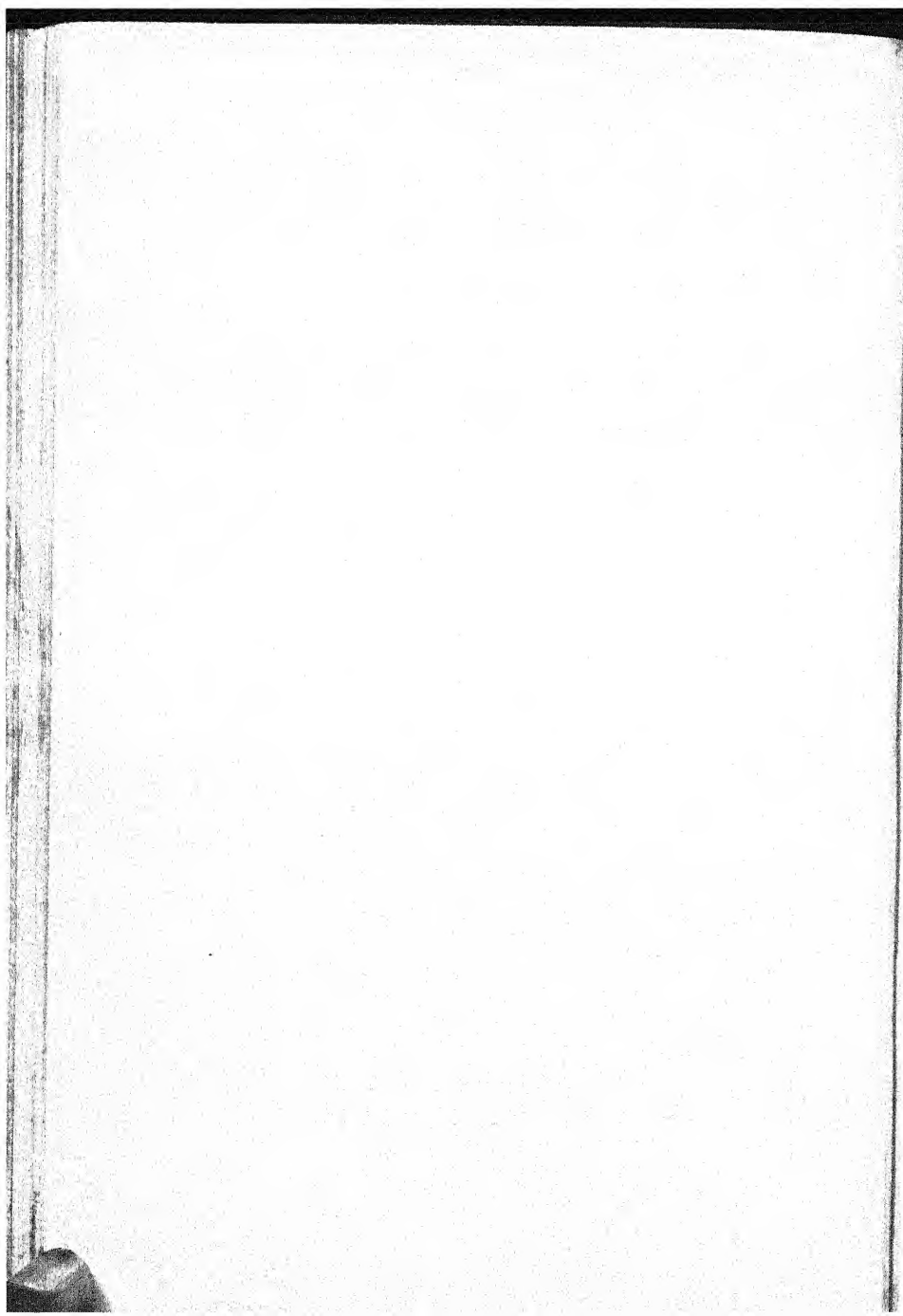


proximating a conference with more than 150 men in the group. Probably the ideal size for a conference group is one with 16 members. With less than 10 members present, there may be at times a dearth of ideas on the subject under discussion. When the group numbers between 12 and 25, there will be little difference noticed so far as the leader's problem of control is concerned. As the size of the group increases above the latter figure, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain complete control of the conference situation. When leading discussion with a group of 45, the leader must exert himself to the utmost if he wishes to conduct a good conference. Whenever possible, groups as large as this should be split in two and conducted as separate conferences. When this cannot be done the leader must simply do the best he can with the large group.

*Giving the Appearance of Being Extempore:* I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of making the most careful preparation of the material for each conference conducted. Now I should like to say a word about the advantages of giving your group the impression that the conference is being conducted extemporaneously. Even though you may spend hours in preparing a most detailed conference plan for an important meeting, you should finally memorize most of the plan, and reduce the remainder of it to such data as may be outlined on a 3 by 5 card. The only exception to this would occur in the case of a supervisor who was leading conferences in a rehearsed-conference training pro-

gram, and who was expected to keep before him the conference plan furnished him at the rehearsal meeting. Except in this instance, the less impression of preparedness there is evident, the better; and this is particularly true when the leader expects to sell certain ideas to his group.

*The Total Responsibility of the Conference Leader:* When things go wrong in a conference, and the meeting turns out badly, there is a temptation for the leader to make excuses for the failure. If, he says, certain things *beyond my control* had not occurred, the meeting would have been successful. Unfortunately for this contention, however, aside from actual "acts of God," there is nothing that can occur in any conference that is beyond the power of the leader to control. If every conference leader would subscribe wholeheartedly to this theory, fewer poor conferences would be conducted. For whatever happens in any conference, the leader must take the entire responsibility. He has planned the meeting. He knows his group. He knows how to lead conferences. He knows how to meet emergency conference situations. He has learned to obviate most emergencies before they arise. Under these circumstances, if the conference fails to attain its objective, the leader has failed as a conference leader, and excuses are not in order. Conversely, whenever a conference is completely successful, the leader is entirely justified in taking full credit for having done a fine job.



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